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PRIVATE EYE

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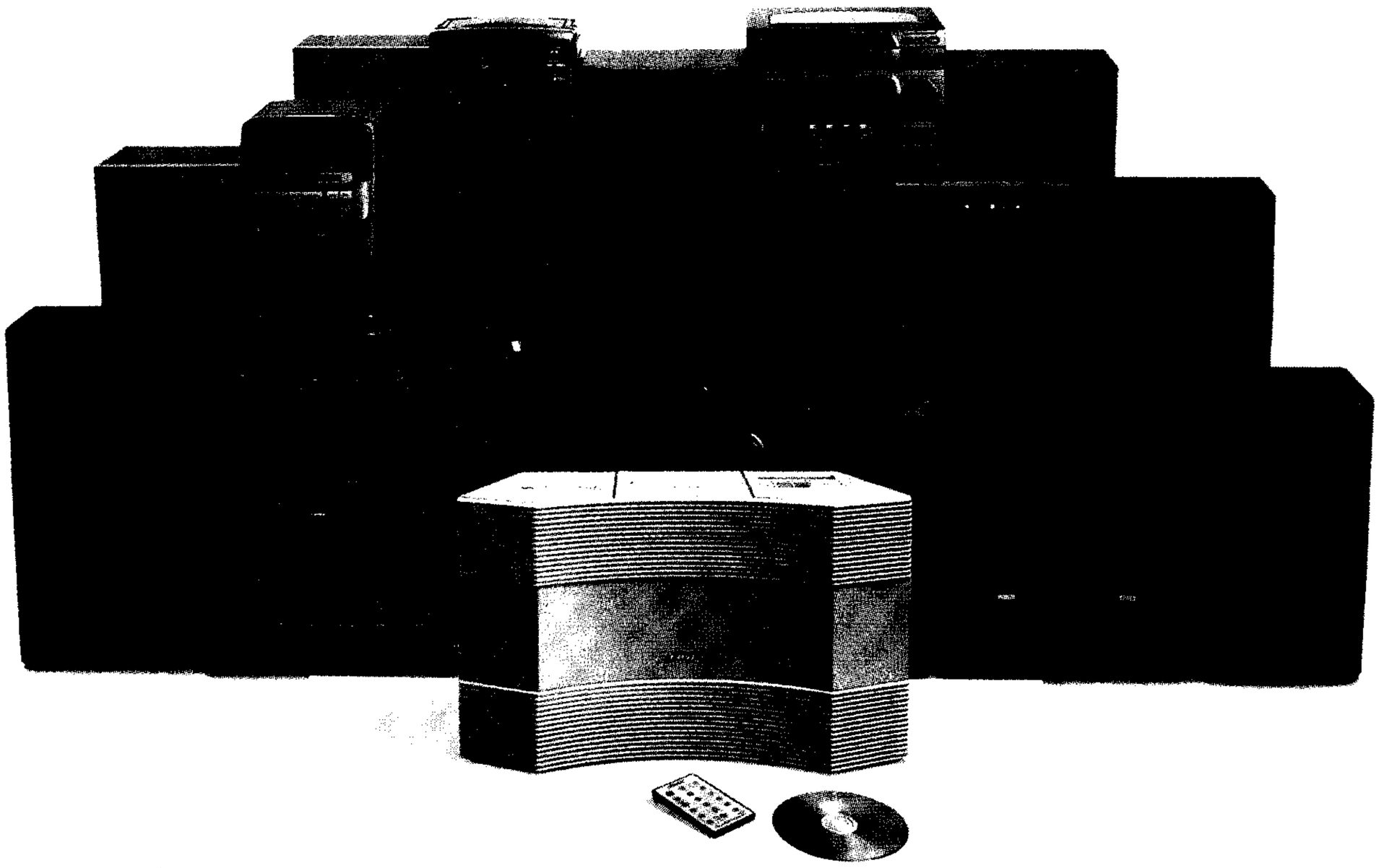

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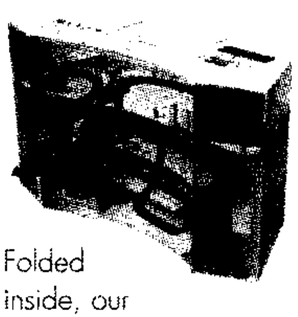

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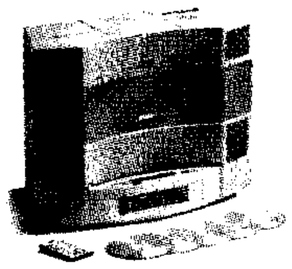

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Gnomeman Sachs

A Statement From The Chairman

PRESS reports concerning the regrettable theft of several billions of pounds from me by my personal assistant, Ms Rita Chevrolet, may have given the impression that we at Gnomeman Sachsofmoney are so rich that we haven't a clue what is going on under our noses. Some malicious commentators have even tried to suggest that if I can't spot my secretary stealing from me then this does not say much for my ability to look after my clients' valuable investments.

It would be hard to imagine a more disgraceful farrago of lies – apart from the one about Ms Chevrolet and I having an affair.

The simple truth, however, is that in the frenetic world of global high finance it is impossible to keep track of minor transactions such as the transfer of the odd 8 billion pounds taken from petty cash by Ms Chevrolet in order to buy sundry office requisites such as paperclips, Pritt-sticks, 14-bedroom mansions in Esher, bottles of Tippex, private jets, Post-it notes, Cartier watches, drawing pins and the Koh-i-Noor diamond.

I hope that will reassure my clients that their money is safe in my secretary's handbag.

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Winning the 'Yes' vote

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TONY BLAIR is used to hearing laughter at meetings of the parliamentary Labour party as MPs respond to his jokes. But at the PLP meeting on 20 April there was laughter of a different sort.

After a short explanation of his momentous U-turn on the subject of a referendum on the European Union constitution, the Dear Leader had to deal with some anxious questions from loyalists. Nick Palmer, Labour MP for Broxtowe, is not known for his amazing dynamism and normally has nothing but praise for Blair. But he rather mournfully read out the text of a letter he'd written the previous week to a constituent explaining in detail why a referendum was out of the question.

Replying to him, Blair argued that it was time to draw a line under the issue and get back to the "domestic agenda". If only, he mused, the meeting could come up with a catchphrase, a form of words from the prime minister that would light up the party for the long and exciting road ahead. The momentary silence was broken by Bob Marshall-Andrews, irreverent MP for Medway, booming out a suggestion for his leader: "I resign!" Cue much laughter.

At the same meeting Blair answered a long question from Tam Dalyell. Was Tam satisfied by the reply? Having heard him out, Dalyell uttered the single word: "Barking!"

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

If we stretch the chain of logic taut, we can call Atkinson [Ron] the father of the racially tolerant society.

— *Simon Barnes*, The Times.

ACCORDING to the *Guardian*, Richard "Dirty" Desmond's declaration that Germans "are all fucking Nazis" will shock the Conservative party, which his *Daily Express* is now supporting. "The outburst will also come as a shock to the Frankfurt-based bank Commerzbank, which bankrolled Mr Desmond's acquisition of the *Express* titles."

Not much of a shock, actually, if Commerzbank and the Tories have been paying attention to these columns. Back in February 2002 we revealed that one of Dirty Des's former employees, an East German refugee named Andre Tomas, had slapped a racial harassment suit on the porn baron. Tomas claimed that Dirty Des yelled "Heil Hitler" and "I hate fucking Germans" whenever he saw him.

In *Eye* 1048 we noted that Des's lawyers were trying desperately to settle the case, since "the last thing Des wants at this stage is a public airing of his pathological hatred of the Hun, and his opinion that 'all Germans are fucking Nazis' might not go down too well with the German Commerzbank, which lent him £97m to buy the *Express*."

The solicitors offered to pay Tomas a substantial out-of-court sum if he would sign a statement that Dirty Des had never said "all Germans are fucking Nazis". Tomas replied that he would see them in court, and that his account of Des's deranged rantings was backed by affidavits from no fewer than 14 witnesses. Desmond's lawyers then capitulated, in the hope of keeping his colourful opinions from a wider audience.

All in vain, alas.

AS Richard Desmond and his feeble henchmen goose-stepped out of Canary Wharf last week, *Telegraph* chief executive Jeremy Deedes was quick to point out that the German media group Axel Springer, currently favourite to take over his paper, has "established as one of its five principles the recognition of the state of Israel".

This commitment might even mean that Barbara Amiel gets to keep her job if the Germans take over. But Deedes omitted to mention another of Axel Springer's "publishing principles" which could cause severe editorial headaches for the Europhobic *Torygraph*. Article one of the company's code promises that all Springer publications will "further the unification of Europe"!

ALL Germans are Nazis, and anyone who does business with them should be treated to Hitler salutes and choruses of "Deutschland Über Alles".

So says Richard Desmond. How odd, then, that he chooses to have his weekly *OK!* magazine printed in, er, Mönchengladbach by the German company Tiefdruck Schwann-Bagel (TSB) GmbH.

Nor does his hostility to Germans extend to refusing their largesse. Dirty Des got a large golden hello from TSB for the *OK!* contract, said by industry sources to have been not unadjacent to £250,000.

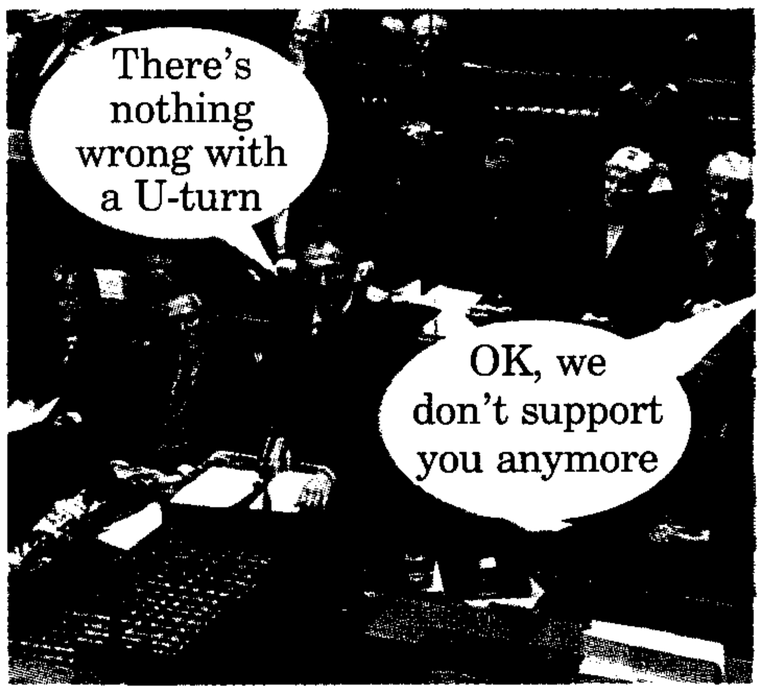
MYSTIC MARK

"Another six weeks of insurgency sounds about right, after which it will peter out..." — Mark Steyn's New Year predictions for Iraq, *Spectator*, 27 December 2003.

IN A world of "dogging", "piking" and other exotic modern practices, it can be tricky for hacks to keep up with the latest street-slang.

Last week, however, consensus was reached on the Street of Shame on how to deal with the Kevin Spacey "mugging" story. The *Independent*, *Times*, *Mirror* and *Daily Mail* all described the actor not as a friend of Dorothy but "a friend of Peter Mandelson".

BLAIR EURO SHOCK



Street of Shame

"SHRINKING violet Richard Desmond may have made the front pages last week," writes the *Observer*'s Pendennis, "but it is unlikely the Express group proprietor will have read reports of his ill-advised antics." On the day Desmond walked into Express Towers, he took a call from Rupert Murdoch advising him never to read any stories about himself – and, the diarist reveals, "Desmond has obeyed the command ever since."

Not so. Dirty Des keeps a close eye on what is written about him, as former *Express* editor Rosie Boycott confirmed in her diary which was published by the *Sunday Times* in July 2002. An entry for December 2000 reads thus: "Wednesday, 13 December. Morning meeting. Desmond is late and deflated… The latest *Private Eye* contains a savage attack on him. This causes a rant about press coverage. I've heard his wife was upset by the *Daily Mail*, which called him 'Desmond the Degrader'. He becomes very emotional…"

He still does.

THE *Daily Express*'s "historic decision" to back the Conservatives had all the impact of a piece of wet cod dropping in a snowdrift. Scarcely anyone realised that the *Express* still supported the government anyway.

A section headed "IMMIGRATION" dominated the two-page spread explaining the reasons for the paper's defection. No surprises there: for months the *Express* has done little else but rant about the government's failure to tackle "the immigration and asylum problem". In a signed editorial last Thursday, editor Peter Hill declared: "Immigration is a national disaster… As every sane person knows, our country cannot cope."

So what has Hill himself done to curb the influx? Bizarrely enough, he is now married to a statuesque young lady from, er, Somalia.

PRINCESS Diana's hounding at the hands of the press coincided with Stuart Higgins's stint as editor of the *Sun*. But when Rupert Murdoch eventually became unhappy with the rag's increasingly brutal nature, he replaced Higgins with the less offensive David Yelland (before reverting to form by appointing the current editor).

Higgins has now reinvented himself as a paler version of Max Clifford and founded the PR firm, Stuart Higgins Communications. And despite Charles Spencer's previous rants about the tabloid press, Diana's brother has now found himself able to hire Higgins to help him "build meaningful relationships with the media".

So far this has extended to expressing disgust at the broadcast of photos of Spencer's dying sister, and to deflecting (ludicrous and unpatriotic) criticism of the earl's plan to make millions by building 2,500 new homes on his land (where there wasn't space to house Diana when she was actually still alive).

"I LAY claim to the title 'Nostradamus of the Right'," boasts the bumptious historian Andrew Roberts in the *Daily Telegraph*. "Back in 1994, I prophesied that a referendum would be held in 2006… I stand astonished at my own prescience."

Curiously, he omits to mention a more recent example of his unerring prescience. "I give you a guarantee," he told friends four months ago, "that Conrad Black will still be the owner of the *Telegraph* in three years' time."

"THE British press has created a hate-filled culture," complains youthful *Indie* pundit Johann Hari, describing how he witnessed the hate machine at work when he appeared on a TV show presented by the *Sun*'s gorblimey specialist Richard Littlejohn.

Hari notes that Littlejohn is "notoriously homophobic". Indeed. But are *Independent* contributors any more enlightened?

Editor Simon Kelner recently hosted a Groucho Club dinner for the paper's columnists at which political pundit Bruce "the Brute" Anderson called Hari "an uppity little queer". The ensuing fracas was rounded off in traditional fashion with another columnist, Deborah Orr, tipping a glass of red wine over The Brute.

THE *Spectator* recently launched The Skills Debate, a forum for captains of industry and economic analysts to pass on their expert knowledge to the ranks of British management. To kick things off, the magazine printed and sponsored a special supplement entitled *Skills for Business*. Among those offering the benefit of their insight and experience were CBI director Digby Jones, TUC general-secretary Brendan Barber and former *Observer* editor Will Hutton.

Some *Spectator* readers may have done a double-take when they saw Hutton's name among the list of contributors. For back in July 2002 the magazine published a deeply unflattering profile of his modus operandi while running the Work Foundation (formerly the Industrial Society). Author Derek Matthews summarised this as "sacking, cronyism and asset-stripping".

Just under two years on, lo and behold there is Hutton enlightening *Spectator* readers on how British business should be run. Shome mishtake, shurely?

"Well that sorts out that, then, Mr Rumpelstiltskin"

WHEN Sholto Byrnes stepped down as *Independent* diarist recently, there was an obvious successor on the premises: his flame-haired deputy Katy Guest. But laddish editor Simon Kelner decided to poach the deputy at the *Torygraph*'s feeble "London Spy" diary, Guy Adams, instead.

Although Kelner seems to regard this as a tremendous coup, in fact the *Telegraph* was only too glad to get rid of the self-styled "Guy from London Spy". Adams's parting gift to the paper was to print a fictitious story about Barbara Cassani, head of the London Olympic bid, over which she promptly sued.

As editor Martin Newland told his diary editor Charlie Methven when discussing who should replace Adams: "What I don't want is another arrogant 17-year-old who doesn't know anything about journalism." An understandable prejudice, given that the *Telegraph* has now had to pay Cassani £80,000 to settle her libel action.

HOW delightful to see the *Daily Mail* serialising the memoirs of former *Sindie* editor Janet Street-Porter, aka the Voice of Yoof, last week.

Relations between Janet and Paul Dacre's mighty organ were not always so cosy. When Street-Porter presented her one-woman show, *All the Rage*, at Edinburgh last summer, *Mail* hatchet-woman Alison Boshoff was sent to dig up dirt on her family background, from which much of the show's material was drawn. Boshoff duly delivered a muck-racking piece which asked "Why is Miss Street-Porter… so keen to wash her family's dirty laundry in public?"

When Street-Porter learned that Boshoff had been sniffing around her relations, she felt compelled to call her at midnight and warn her off: "You have been harassing my sister. Don't you fucking go near or phone her or disturb my family again. Do you understand me? I will be speaking to my lawyer tomorrow to stop you from going to her door again."

Presumably the financial incentive offered by the *Mail* for her memoirs was enough to heal these old scars. Now they can both get on with washing her family's dirty laundry in public.

THE *Daily Express* made a bid for the most pathetic front page of the year award with its 17 April splash, "Jacko in 'suicide' mystery".

"Pop fans throughout the world were stunned yesterday by a report that troubled superstar Michael Jackson had committed suicide," the paper's showbusiness editor Ruth Hilton breathlessly reported. "Investigations finally proved, however, that it was a cruel hoax."

Well, yes. Most people who received the fake email, which had done the rounds of offices the previous afternoon, quickly spotted that the page they were directed to belonged to the well-known website fakeawish.com, which allows visitors to create made-up news stories featuring the names of their friends. The only "investigation" needed to ensure that it was a fake, and not worthy of a front-page splash, was a single click on the link beneath, which reveals the message "Ha! The story you read was a complete hoax!"

IF THE *Telegraph* ever needs a new boxing correspondent, it could do worse than turn to its low-profile athletics hack Tom Knight, following a stunning one-round performance in the bar of Brussels' Plaza Hotel.

Fortunately Hollywood star Johnny Depp had left the bar before an angry argument broke out between John Capriatti, a top executive from the sportswear company Nike, and a group including Knight.

Matters turned ugly, and the *Telegraph* hack soon found himself on the deck. While three members of the hotel staff held Capriatti back, Knight was dragged away by a Belgian waiter – still yelling at the Nike chief: "I'll hurt you! I'll hurt you!"

It remains to be seen how this will affect the *Torygraph*'s exclusive columns from Britain's only real Olympic athletics gold-medal hopeful, Paula Radcliffe – who is signed to, er, Nike.

LAST MONTH Cherie Blair wrote movingly in the *Observer* about the plight of women in prison, saying too many were being locked away.

Her article was largely based on information supplied by the Prison Reform Trust and timed to coincide with a Fawcett Society conference on the issue. But sadly neither benefited from the £500 fee paid by the newspaper.

Administrative staff at the *Obs* were somewhat shocked when Downing Street said the cheque should be made out to the rather wealthy QC herself. "No comment".

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HACKWATCH

Tosh and Becks

"THIS is the biggest story of the decade," Kay Burley announced on Sky TV while interviewing Rebecca Loos. And who could disagree? Certainly not the Street of Shame, which has been able to think of little else since 4 April, when the news of David Beckham's alleged dalliance broke with all the dramatic promise of a thunderclap over a parched landscape. *Après ça, le deluge…*

5 April: The *Sun*'s showbiz editor Victoria Newton reveals that Posh was "close to collapse" after learning of the *News of the Screws* story in a late-night phone call last Saturday. "Victoria went mad," an unnamed friend tells Newton. "She told David it had ruined her birthday." The news of his affair had come as a "bombshell", leaving Victoria "devastated".

6 April: The *Sun*'s showbiz editor Victoria Newton reveals that, er, Posh isn't devastated at all. "The mood is very much one of, 'We won't be beaten by this'," an unnamed pal says, adding that Posh had known about the allegations for a long time. "They have already been through this pain and it is behind them. It's ancient history."

8 April: Amanda Platell explains to *Mail* readers "why we women hate Posh". Victoria Beckham is "like a praying mantis, this skinny, cunning stick insect come to suck the young David dry… And that's why women can't stand her, and why we are all siding with David."

Over in the *Sun*, however, Victoria Newton expresses her "disgust" at the taunting of Posh. "I think Victoria should be applauded," Newton gushes. "She represents all that is good about Britain – she's hard working, caring and a good role model."

Clearly this can't be the same Victoria Newton who never misses a chance to mock Posh in her Bizarre column. "I've got hold of Posh Spice's top-secret rap album and I've only one thing to say – hallelujah that it'll never see the light of day," she wrote on 15 January. "Victoria murders the Beatles and massacres George Michael… rubbish… torture… embarrassing." On 1 March, she gleefully reported "the death of Victoria Beckham's singing career. The patient's demise comes after the flop of Posh's special DVD album. Don't tell me, you didn't even know it was out? Few people did." On 25 March she contrasted a photo of a healthy, smiling Geri Halliwell with one of "stick-thin Victoria… doing her lady of leisure routine".

10 April: "Why do I hate Posh?" Julie Burchill writes in the *Times*. "Let's count the ways, because few things are as much fun as kicking a bighead when they're down." Meanwhile, Victoria Newton of the *Sun* shares with readers the juicy details of Rebecca Loos's confession to an unnamed friend: "He blamed Victoria for not bringing [the children] to Spain… David said it was as if Victoria had lost interest in him and the boys… The marriage was in trouble before my affair with David so I am not to blame for the breakdown of their relationship."

Newton fails to explain how this tallies with her own pronouncement two days ago: "Her husband is alleged to have had an affair and somehow it's Victoria's fault? Excuse me, but did I miss something here?" Apparently so.

12 April: "Mr and Mrs David Beckham's unfortunate marital difficulties are no concern of mine," Peter McKay writes in the *Daily Mail*. And so, to prove the point, he devotes much of his column to the subject. As does Tony Parsons in the *Mirror*: "Fake breasts, fake hair, fake nails, fake smiles – Victoria Beckham shouldn't be that surprised that her 'perfect' marriage turns out to be just another big sham." (Perhaps he has read Amanda Platell's piece from four days earlier: "Everything about her is fake – the tan, the breasts, the lips, the nails, the hair.")

Parsons advises Posh to "wipe that stupid rictus grin off her face" and admit she has been "utterly and totally humiliated". She is a "useless wife and hopeless mother", who lacks "even the most basic social graces". This may surprise *Mirror* readers who can remember as far back as 1 December 2003, when Parsons defended Posh against those who called her a "preening egomaniac" for saying that David Beckham wouldn't be quite so famous without her.

"She is absolutely right," Parsons thundered then. "It was the fact that David Beckham was dating, then mating, with a member of the Spice Girls that took his fame around the world… There has not been a more happy marriage of sport and show business since Joe DiMaggio and Marilyn Monroe. My mate Posh gets a lot of stick she doesn't deserve." Much of it now coming from her mate Tony.

13 April: Following Tara Palmer-Tomkinson's comment in yesterday's *Mirror* that posh girls are better in bed, the *Guardian*'s op-ed page carries a thoughtful analysis. "Tara P-T is, if not raising the tone of the debate, at least giving it more texture," Zoe Williams argues. "Who can blame David for going for two posh girls who are everything Posh isn't?" Nevertheless, after much discussion of the "feudal subtext" and Thatcherism's legitimising of "individualistic desires", Williams concludes that Beckham's alleged infidelity "has no great message to impart on matters of class or gender".

14 April: "No, I for one don't hate Posh," Lynda Lee-Potter discloses in the *Daily Mail*. "In fact I suspect many females feel an amalgam of compassion and admiration." (Lee-Potter has already demonstrated this admiration and compassion a week ago, when she described Posh as a "run-of-the-mill singer" who had "put her crumbling career before her angry husband… Nothing ever seems quite enough for her.")

But Sue Carroll of the *Mirror* is outraged by Posh's smiling defiance. "It's not normal," she opines. "Any wife, subject to such devastating allegations about her husband, would be red-eyed, distraught and pulling down the shutters." Instead, Victoria and David "descended on Claridge's like royalty in a silver Bentley" and, even more disgracefully, "posed for photographers".

This will be yet another surprise for long-suffering *Mirror* readers, if they recall Carroll's comments from four months ago. "You'd have thought, given the hammering she's had lately, Posh's inclination might be to crawl under the nearest stone and lick her wounds," she wrote on 3 December 2003. "Not a bit of it… You can't help but admire that cheek and chutzpah, the determination to thrust her tiny frame into the limelight, throw buckets of cold water over her critics and get on with the show."

15 April: Is Rebecca Loos a sleazy senorita or a stunning sex-bomb? "By convention, male journalists are edged out of this weighty sort of debate and the ground is left open for the big-gun female columnists," writes the *Daily Telegraph* commentator Stephen Robinson.

But when the Glendas wonder why Beckham should stray, "have they actually looked at Rebecca Loos? Splashed across a newspaper spread in a tabloid buy-up no woman looks her best, but even there she is lovely. And when she appears in the Sky Television interview, dressed in simple green vest top and white trousers, she is positively gorgeous."

NEWS
• Becks' shame as he admits sex and txts
• Jealous Posh's fears
• Becks and his Pretty Woman 'hookers'
• Becks sex txts: The unseen messages
• MRSA superbug kills 20,000 people a year
News of the World Online

Surprisingly, there is no word yet from Robinson's colleague W.F. Deedes on whether he too fancies her.

17 April: In the *Times*, psychoanalyst Darian Leader announces that "it's time to take stock of the situation". First, Posh: "She becomes a reductio ad absurdum of everyone else's concern with looking beautiful and maintaining an image… She's not Other enough." Good to have that sorted out. And what of Beckham? "Has he been with anyone other than himself?" the shrink wonders. "He may have been with Rebecca Loos and Sarah Marbeck but, for any Freudian, the thing about those choices is that 'ReBECca' and 'MarBECk' have a 'BEC' in them."

18 April: "Sky One's Kay Burley, who interviewed Rebecca Loos on Thursday, needs to take a chill pill," Carole Malone sneers in the *Sunday Mirror*. "The presenter had been given one of the biggest interviews of her career – but she behaved like a wet-knickered teenager desperate for details of a friend's sexploits. 'Go on, tell me what happened [in the bedroom],' she asked Loos breathlessly. 'Every woman in Britain is dying to know.'"

Malone thinks that for such an important interview Sky should have found someone with "a bit more gravitas". Someone like Carole Malone, perhaps – who in her column last week came over all wet-knickered at "that yummy front-page publicity about David's three-in-a-bed sex sessions, about Rebecca Loos' insatiable sexual appetite".

20 April: David Beckham has had a haircut. This significant development dominates the front page of the tabloid *Times*, forcing the Middle East and the European referendum on to inside pages. His severe new look is "redolent of Buddhist humility", Simon Barnes reports. "Beckham chose to face the world in the most articulate way he knows: by means of a haircut. He has been communicating by that means since puberty: various Beckham avatars have sported haircuts that speak of cuteness, toughness, independence, artistry: all have spoken the truth."

The more upmarket *Daily Star*, which relegates the story to page 8, notes that "throughout history love cheats have had their heads shaved when caught having an affair. Friends said Becks didn't know that and just wanted a change of image." Yet the *Star* also claims that "experts said his tough new cropped look was an attempt to put all the sex slurs behind him". What experts? The *Star* doesn't say. But then in Beckham analysis we are all experts…

21 April: …as Dr Miriam Stoppard quickly confirms. Her face grins out of the front page of the *Daily Mirror*. "Exclusive. DR MIRIAM'S DAMNING VERDICT: Beckham is a total S***." Snob, stud, slag, shit? Who cares? What really matters is the verdict of William Rees-Mogg. Let us pray it comes soon…

I-SPY *Tenerife*

Submitted by Matt Brown

IN THE TEAROOM

IF YOU'RE a wannabe prime minister, every crisis has a silver lining.

Take Charles Clarke. One minute he's a struggling education secretary set to face embarrassing questions on "new" Labour's pisspoor record: kids at bog standard comprehensives five times less likely to shine at A-level than public school brats; shamefully little productivity gain to show for zillions of new money; and so on. Then, blow me down, he's the "angriest man in the cabinet" over Blair's disastrous U-turn, the self-appointed leader of his party's europhile tendency and second only to the chancellor in the putative line of succession.

However, if you believe the alternative version of events being talked about in the tearoom, the Tony and Gordon team have played a blinder over the referendum issue. First, it gets Europe off the general election agenda (you can vote Labour in the election and No to the constitution, so no real need to vote Tory then); second, they get the wink that Rupie will keep the *Sun* and the *Times* onside; third, the Europe issue always works against the Conservatives in the end.

Bill Cash has already been let out of his box to bore for Britain – so that's five Labour marginals safe at a stroke. In a week or so the press will get bored of Blair-bashing and will be creating "Tories split over EU" headlines out of the slightest variation in nuance in the public statements not just of thrusting, young frontbenchers like Liam Fox and Damian Green but of semi-retired old farts like Hezza, Ken Clarke and John Major too.

And last, but by no means least, Blair-Brown get to write the EU constitution themselves. The Giscard draft is, everyone agrees, unsellable. So it won't be the one we're asked to vote for. After a few synthetic spats, a bit of shuttle diplomacy round the new accession states, an emergency summit or two – behold the new sanitized constitution, all British red lines unblurred. Blair takes on Brussels and wins. Tremendous triumph for Britain, third landslide victory in a row for Labour, all topped off by the great, reforming UK EU presidency in the second half of 2005.

Could this happen? Would Rupert let it? Or is it just a Blairite fantasy?

'Quintus Slide'

BBC world affairs editor John Simpson had to call up the Arab-British Chamber of Commerce last week and demand that it stop putting it about that he was booked to be the guest dinner speaker at "Iraq Procurement 2004".

The business conference, at the London Hilton hotel this week, will see 300 of the world's largest companies, including Shell, ExxonMobil and arms manufacturer Raytheon, meeting members of the US-installed Iraqi authorities. Touted as a "Meet the Buyers" event, organisers hope it will lead to contracts being signed.

Simpson says he only found out he was listed to speak at the dinner (plus jazz quartet and entertainers), when Iraq solidarity campaign group Voices in the Wilderness UK (Voices) put out a press release urging him to pull out. He told Voices he had now told the organisers there was "no possibility" of him taking part and that he'd "never accept an invitation to anything as contentious as this." The conference organisers removed his name from the agenda.

One person who will be attending the event is former DTI minister Brian Wilson MP, Tony Blair's "special envoy in Iraq", who apparently has no qualms about giving the opening address.

THE UK Independence Party is broadly conservative, so it's no surprise it should endorse family values.

As its current manifesto declares: "A further unfortunate result of expanding state provision and other government policies has been to undermine the family as the basic stable unit of society."

It is, however, something of a surprise that the party should have enlisted the services of Dick Morris to mastermind its electoral strategy. A former presidential adviser in Washington, Morris was forced to resign from the Clinton White House when he was caught cheating on his wife with a $200-an-hour prostitute. Morris, it was reported, took particular pleasure in phoning up the president while in the company of the lady in question. He had also fathered a child by a woman to whom he was not married.

Morris subsequently blamed his failings on sex addiction, for which he decided to undergo a course of counselling. "Like all 12-step programmes to cope with the problems facing one," he said, "it is both agonising and successful." UKIP must certainly be hoping so.

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

March: Treasury ensures 16 to 18 year olds will receive minimum wage of £112 a week if they choose to work full-time.

April: Department for education and skills offers 16 to 18 year olds incentive payments of "up to £30 a week" to stay on at school.

ROLY-POLY education secretary Charles Clarke obviously takes the problems of obesity in schoolchildren seriously.

Which is why his appointment of Sir Anthony Greener as chairman of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority has raised some eyebrows. Until 2001, Greener chaired the food and drinks conglomerate Diageo, overseeing the firm's various promotional drives to get more children into its Burger King restaurants.

ULSTER UPDATE

THE public purse shelled out millions in the 1990s to give Northern Ireland a natural gas supply for the first time. Now the private companies in charge of the fledgling industry have plunged it into crisis.

Phoenix Natural Gas, a former subsidiary of British Gas owned by water company East Surrey Holdings, hit Ulster customers with a painful 10.8 percent price increase last October. Phoenix attempted to introduce a further 20 percent hike earlier this month, but it was put on hold following uproar from customers. Phoenix blames the big rises on its wholesale supplier, former British Gas stablemate Centrica.

Throughout the controversy, one man has remained surprisingly quiet. Sir Gerry Loughran was the top man at Ulster's department of economic development when it granted Phoenix a monopoly supply licence in 1996. He retired from the Northern Ireland civil service in late 2002. Last year he became chairman of, er, Phoenix Natural Gas!

NEW Northern Ireland minister Barry Gardiner needed no introduction when he met Bruce Robinson, his permanent secretary at Ulster's department of enterprise.

The two men have a rather strained history. Gardiner, MP for Brent North, was on the Commons public accounts committee (PAC) in 1999 when it grilled Robinson, who was at the time chief executive of an Ulster job creation quango, the Industrial Development Board (IDB).

The PAC was scathing about the IDB's record and accused it of putting taxpayers' money at risk. Gardiner and the other MPs also bollocked Robinson and a senior colleague over their performance before the committee: "We found their evidence, at times, to be contradictory and confusing."

Hopefully Bruce and Barry can follow the example of so many others in Northern Ireland, and let bygones be bygones!

FE NEWS

ONCE upon a time students could make their own cheap entertainment by holding a protest. But at Leicester university even a demonstration about student poverty can be expensive.

Angry students recently descended on the car park of the university admin building, where the vice-chancellor's office is, to scatter home-made monopoly money and spell out the word "debt" using 70 bags of flour.

The Student's Union has now been slapped with a bill for £10,000 in "costs" from the university. Union president Matt Knight said the bill included charges for refreshment for security staff and "lost revenue" in the cafeteria (even though the protest had deliberately been timed for the day of the lecturers' strike) and for "management time".

"They tried to charge us for the time they spent watching us out of the window," says Mr Knight. "It was a peaceful protest. Vice-chancellors around the country sold us out and we are angry about that… We are still in negotiations and haven't yet paid for anything except for some damage to one car."

SECURITY MEASURES

TIMES may be bad for the security industry, said a trading update on 7 April from Reliance Security plc, part of the Hemscott group, but the company is still making progress.

For instance: "The mobilisation of the seven-year £150m contract to provide infrastructure and services for prisoner escorting and court custody in Scotland is proceeding smoothly"; and "as announced in February we have been appointed preferred bidder for a similar £250m contract in South Wales and the West of England".

Alas, the following week Reliance managed to lose a murderer in its care in Scotland (he's still at large) and, a couple of days later, it lost another prisoner it was escorting. To date "Reliance" has lost five prisoners.

A STORY headlined "Syria seeks our help to woo US" in Saturday's *Weekend Australian* misquoted National Party senator Sandy Macdonald.

The quote stated "Syria is a country that has been a bastard state for nearly 40 years", but should have read "Syria is a country that has been a Baathist state for nearly 40 years". *The Australian* regrets any embarrassment caused by the error.

The Australian

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

MORE on the in-fighting between Tory MEPs who, as we reported in the last *Eye*, have hitched their wagon in the European parliament to that of the ardently federalist European People's Party (EPP).

Under orders from the EPP, Jonathan Evans, leader of the British Tories, instructed all his MEPs to remove their names from a damaging motion calling for a censure – effectively a vote of no-confidence – in the European Commission over its handling of corruption cases. Slowly, most of the MEPs complied; but the hard rump of 11 who held out received a stiff letter from the party chairman Liam Fox telling them to jolly well do what they're told.

The letter pointedly included a draft page of the forthcoming Tory Euro manifesto extolling the virtues of maintaining an alliance with the EPP. In the draft manifesto, all 36 Conservative candidates are required to state allegiance to the new arrangement. "When elected, every Conservative Member of the European Parliament will be committed to this position." According to insiders, not agreeing would be "a sacking offence".

One MEP who buckled under and removed his name referred to the leadership's "phyrric victory". But seven MEPs, braving the threat of de-selection, have held out and are now known to fellow Eurosceptics as the "Magnificent Seven". Of them, four have been selected at the top of their regional list thus more or less being guaranteed re-election. At least one, *Daily Telegraph* columnist Dan Hannan, has made his opposition to maintaining links to the EPP a fundamental part of his selection speech.

AND WHAT of the censure motion itself? Overall, 69 MEPs voted in its support. A solid 200 voted in plenary at Strasbourg in favour of a much weaker measure: a resolution that the commission has failed to accept its political responsibility.

If things go the same way at the next meeting in early May, the present "lame-duck" commission could even go the way of its predecessor and have to resign. But that is unlikely to happen. Brussels institutions are determined to keep a lid on any EU disgraces in the run-up to the European parliamentary elections in June. So somehow a way will be found to save the commission's bacon.

WITH the Euro elections on 10 June approaching fast, why have Labour party bosses in Scotland been so slow to move in the case of MEP David Martin, the vice-president of the European parliament who is alleged to have abused his generous office allowances?

In recent years hard-nosed Labour bosses have acted first and asked questions later (as with Scotland's first minister, Henry McCleish, and controversial MP George Galloway). But they seem to be having second thoughts about Martin, Labour's most senior Euro parliamentarian, who, thank to members' votes, now tops his region's candidates' list for the June election.

Martin had been tipped to become Labour's choice for president of the Strasbourg parliament until the brother of his estranged wife claimed that the MEP had "diverted office allowance payments". One of Martin's colleagues, Bill Miller – who happens to be number three on the central Scotland electoral list and has less chance of being re-elected – is adamant that Labour's investigation is "insufficiently rigorous" and that the allegations "tar all MEPs".

This comradely behaviour extends to another Blairite favourite, Catherine Stihler, who has maintained a studious silence as Martin sees his career potentially torn to shreds. By curious coincidence, should Labour's inquiry find against Martin and he is indeed de-fenestrated in a couple of weeks' time, Miller will rise to number two on the party's election list and have a much better chance of being reelected.

A central part of the claim against Martin is that some of his office allowances "were deposited in an investment fund – including in Lloyds Bowmaker". Lloyds Bowmaker is in fact a finance house to which Martin's office was making HP payments for… a franking machine!

Meanwhile Martin's political enemies, including Miller and Euro Labour leader Gary Titley, are busy promoting another Labour MEP, Terry Wynn, for the parliamentary presidency. But if, as seems increasingly likely, Martin emerges with a clean bill of health, what of the political health of the uninspiring leader of Labour's increasingly unsettled MEPs, Gary Titley?

According to Martin's parliamentary supporters, Titley hasn't even spoken to Martin about the allegations but has had plenty of time for his opponents. If Labour performs as badly at the European poll as many pollsters expect, it may be Gary, not David, who is obliged to spend more time with his family...

HANS-MARTIN Tillack, the investigative journalist who exposed EU corruption and whose office and home were duly raided last month by Belgian police at the behest of OLAF, the EU's supposed fraud investigation unit (see *Eye* 1103), has begun litigation to claim for loss of ability to work as a journalist.

Tillack's PC, files and mobile phones were taken away, and his sources are now understandably unwilling to talk to him. There has been no charge against Tillack and none is anticipated.

Belgian magistrates dismissed his initial petition, but Tillack plans to appeal: if necessary, all the way to the European court of human rights in Strasbourg. Last week members of the International Federation of Journalists demonstrated in Tillack's support outside the Belgian police HQ – and another raid on his office swiftly followed, with police removing 600 pages of material left behind after their earlier visit.

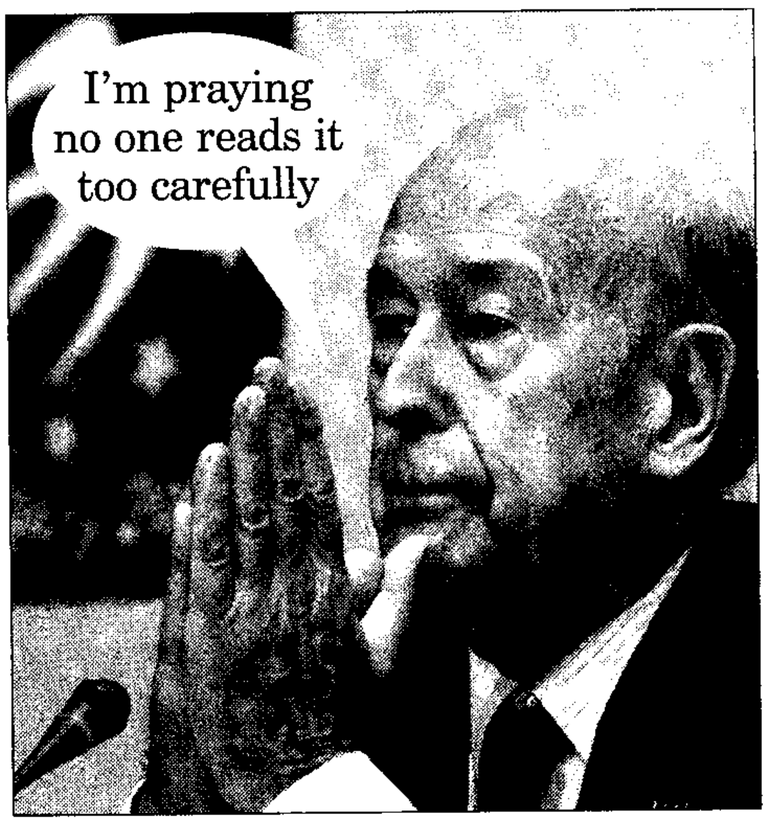
Papers which have been removed come from files on the commission's vice-president Neil Kinnock, Julius Muis, who resigned as head of the commission's internal audit service complaining that he was held back in investigations of the Eurostat scandal, and Marta Andreasen, the EU whistleblower.

Party has new branch chairman

THE Stroud and District Branch of the United Kingdom Independence Party have elected a new branch chairman, Mr Ron Bishop, who has taken over from Tony Gardiner who is emigrating.

Stroud News and Journal

GISCARD'S NEW CONSTITUTION



Pseuds Corner

I was disappointed to find Laurie Taylor making fun of feminist research by singling out my presentation for the British Sociological Association conference "Wax, pluck or thread: Normalising hair removal in the beauty salon."

It reflects badly on sociology as a discipline when senior sociologists trivialise feminist studies of women's mundane practices. Hair removal is a normative practice for the majority of UK women and supports a multi-million pound depilation industry *[continues]*

MERRAN TOERIEN, Letter to Times Higher Educational Supplement

Her buildings seem to use an unknown rule of statics to arrest an almost boundless energy in pregnant equipoise. It would not take an enormous stretch of the imagination to think that the Strasbourg tram terminal came about because a divine wind swept through the city, selecting only the material it needed and knowing precisely where to put it, leaving a structure whose perfection we can only dimly intuit.

JEREMY MELVIN on Zaha Hadid, *Architect's Journal*

"And They Lived Ugly Ever After": Cross-Species Desire in Shrek

lecture to be delivered by NOREEN GIFFNEY of University College Dublin at the 'Queer Matters' Conference, King's College London, May 2004

I'd love to be thought of as more superficial. It's my goal.

UMA THURMAN, *The Times*

Their sound colonises an unsettling area midway between the hammering drum machine and guitar of controversial 80s trio Big Black and the murky noise of early Throbbing Gristle. The divertingly titled anti-war songs Britain Is Shit and Fuck the Poor may lack a certain lyrical finesse, or indeed any lyrical finesse whatsoever, but at a time when most protest in rock music comes with an air of meek appeasement, their uncompromising rage sounds strangely refreshing.

ALEXIS PETRIDIS reviews pop sensation Selfish Cunt, *Guardian*

Pseuds Corporate

We have named the launch train after Raedwald, King of the East Angles in the early 600s AD. Raedwald was a man ahead of his time – he understood the diversity of his people embracing a wide range of Christian and non-Christian beliefs. As well as being open-minded, he was honest and reliable. Raedwald earned such a reputation that he was the only King of this region to be named Bretwalda. This prestigious title was given to Kings regarded as the overlord of England. Raedwald's approach set an example we would like to follow given that the whole of England ultimately looked to Raedwald.

Railway company One announce the launch of their East Anglian franchise

CONTRIBUTORS: Helen Matthews, Edmund Standing, Joyce Parvin, Anon, Louis Hellman, Anon.

£10 paid for all entries

FIVE TV

Derren Brown: Trick Of The Mind (Channel 4)

ON Channel 4 last autumn, the illusionist Derren Brown managed to avoid shooting himself in the head during a stunt in which he played Russian roulette, giving the impression that he had managed to guess in which chamber a member of the public had placed the bullet. This brought Brown a great deal of publicity and left the impression that, whatever kind of magician he was, he was certainly a formidable actor, given his convincing depiction of sweaty terror as he put the weapon to his temple.

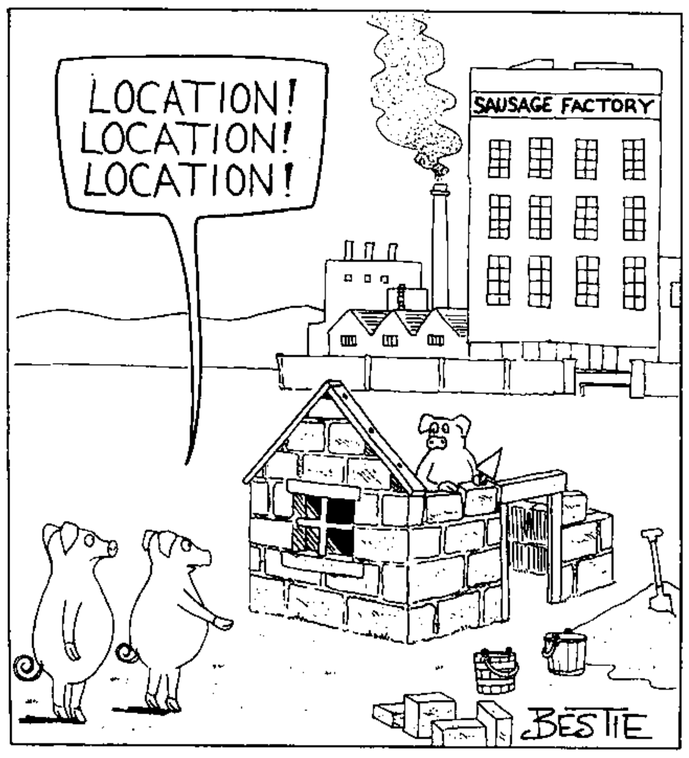
In subsequent interviews, however, Brown has repeatedly shot himself squarely in the foot. An announcement by police in Jersey (where the stunt was filmed to by-pass mainland Britain's strict gun laws) that the production team had pledged they were using no live ammo left Derren in something of a bind.

Pressed by interviewers, he offers two propositions: first, that if the Jersey police had been tricked, they would not want to admit this to the island legislature; and, second, that any intelligent viewer must realise there was never any actual risk of Brown blowing out his brains on television.

Leaving us no closer to the truth, these answers are typical of Brown's sleight-of-mouth. He's at it again in his opening link on **Derren Brown: Trick Of The Mind**, a new six-part series for Channel 4 designed to capitalise on the profile achieved by his gun-stunt. "This programme features magic, suggestion, psychology, misdirection and showmanship. I achieve the results you see through a combination of these techniques."

The problem with this credo, as with Brown's "explanation" of his Russian roulette stunt, is that it allows the performer to do anything he wants in pursuit of an illusion. A particular trick could all be kosher or it could all be balls.

Paul Daniels may be an arrogant prat but he always insisted



on having a studio audience and even teams of UN-style independent observers on his television shows. As Daniels well understood, TV is such an easily deceitful medium that, once an illusion show is made on videotape and edited, there's no way of showing that the cleverness was not added in post-production. We never know the status of what we're watching.

This doubt cripples Brown's programme. Most of his stunts are objectively astonishing. He seems to make a London cabdriver forget where the London Eye is and circle the tourist attraction while apologising for being unable to find it. Brown, who claims to be crap at chess, then takes on nine FIDE grandmasters simultaneously, not only winning the match but having predicted the number of pieces left on each board in an envelope sealed beforehand in the pocket of one player.

All of this is passable entertainment but, since the sleight-of-mouth interviews about what happened in Jersey, there's no reason at all to believe anything we are seeing or any of Brown's carefully worded links. For example, he appears to hypnotise or brainwash the taxi-driver by spinning him a yarn about having lost a wheel on a toy car and then spending all day looking for it but we simply can't know if we've seen every communication he had with the driver.

The verbal slipperiness becomes even more irritating in the chess sequence, after which Brown announces that he will tell us how he did it. He shows plausibly enough that he simply remembered the move one grandmaster had made against him and then repeated it on another board – so that the great players were effectively competing with each other – but then he comes to the explanation of how he managed to predict the closing disposition in each game. "As for how I predicted the pieces left on each board, I genuinely can't remember," he smugly mugs.

This is typical Brown, initially entertaining but finally infuriating. What is needed is follow-up interviews with, for example, the cabbie who lost the London Eye. Brown does appear to genuinely dupe Stephen Fry with a brilliant and apparently impossible card trick and it seems unlikely that Fry would be a stooge in an illusion but, given the history of television and Brown, wonder is almost immediately diluted by grumpiness.

Brown claims that the show is "providing a journey which comes to a place where the brain starts spinning". That last word is the key one: Brown is the perfect TV magician for the age of the spin-doctor.

'Remote Controller'

DUMB BRITAIN

Weakest Link, BBC2

Anne Robinson: What animal is stamped on eggs to show they have reached European standards, a lion or a unicorn?

Contestant: A chicken.

AR: In what year did the First World War end?

Contestant: 1948.

National Lottery Jet Set, BBC1

Eamonn Holmes: What year is the title of a famous novel by George Orwell?

Contestant: 1949.

MEDIA NEWS

BBC news & current affairs continues its self-flagellation with a raft of new initiatives designed to "re-examine our core journalistic beliefs".

Richard Sambrook, the head of news criticised in the Hutton report (now flagellant-in-chief), is asking hacks to attend a series of discussions asking "What next for BBC News?" The resignation of Richard Sambrook, say some.

The 22 planned sessions are causing much resentment in the newsroom, where the BBC's "core journalistic beliefs" are still highly regarded by many hacks who have never put a foot wrong. The damage done to the corporation was caused by one hack; and Andrew Gilligan no longer works for the BBC. Is it not time to put down the whip and get on with making programmes?

BEFORE the Hutton inquiry the relationship between BBC journalists and their bosses consisted of an occasional brief chat in a corridor or perhaps the odd group bollocking when things went awry.

Post-Hutton, however, it seems a new, gentler "feedback" system for brow-beaten and shell-shocked hacks is required. "Giving and receiving feedback can feel uncomfortable for anyone" is the advice. "To help you, we'll be running Feedback Workshops in locations across the UK", where BBC staff will be trained to "engage in more regular and frequent feedback conversations with your manager".

THE NEOPHILIACS

"Celebrity is the new glue." — *Financial Times*.

"Knitting – the new yoga." — *Daily Express*.

"Food: the new tobacco?" — *Nutrition Review*.

"Is southern Catalonia the new Provence?" — *Sunday Times*.

"Is Gloucestershire the new Hollywood?" — BBC Radio Gloucestershire.

real STORY
IS THAT THE BBC KILLED OFF THEIR DOCUMENTARY DEPARTMENT..
AND REPLACED IT WITH TAME TEN MINUTE A SUBJECT SHOWS LIKE THIS...
POLICE
POLIC
SO THEY CAN STILL SAY THEY MAKE FACTUAL PROGRAMMES!
Ken Pyne

LAST WEEK was a bad one for Sir Peter Burt. Going before irate ITV shareholders, the new chairman received a real going-over when asked to justify the appointment of Charles Allen as CEO, the re-election of directors Brian Pitman, Etienne de Villiers and John McGrath, not to mention the £15m pay-off made to Carlton chairman Michael Green.

Less noticed was the fact that Burt is also a member of the board of Shell which on the same day was forced to admit that it had lied to market analysts about its oil reserves and would accordingly have to resubmit its 2002/3 US accounts at $100m less than originally quoted.

This will be of particular interest to the ITV chairman since he joined the company in 2002 and sits on the multinational's audit committee. Does this augur well for corporate governance in the new broadcasting giant?

WHAT is the official BBC policy on backtracking from single-sourced stories which turn out to be fishy? To judge by an example on BBC Online's technology page, the answer is: pretend they never happened.

In March the BBC, along with other respectable news sources such as *New Scientist* and Reuters, reported that Wolverhampton-based software designer Jim Wightman had devised artificially intelligent "nanniebots" which could monitor children's online chatrooms for paedophile activity while pretending to be real children.

Artificial intelligence (AI) experts who read the story were surprised. The technology described was years ahead of the most cutting edge AI in major research projects, let alone anything devised by a chap working from home.

The *Guardian*'s Bad Science column, along with websites like waxy.org, then quickly tracked down other improbable software-related claims by Mr Wightman. Meanwhile children's charity NCH described the message put out by Mr Wightman's Chatnannies organisation as "completely inappropriate and wrong".

New Scientist took the honest approach to removing the story from its archive, replacing it with a message saying: "Serious doubts have been brought to our attention about this story. Consequently we have removed it while we investigate its veracity."

But visit the webpage where the BBC used to show the story and browsers will simply find a "Page Not Found" error message asking whether you have typed in the web address correctly.

RADIO ONE boss Andy Parfitt continues to maintain that his policy of targeting only listeners aged 15 to 24 has nothing to do with his station's ailing audience figures, which hit an all-time low of 9.4m in the last quarter of last year.

Hence the station's "Ten Hour Take-Over" broadcast on Easter bank holiday Monday made interesting listening. The music choices were all made by listeners, who were invited to phone in and request "anything, by anyone, from any year and any musical style". The offer was taken up eagerly, with multiple demands for Elvis and Abba, as well as tracks from the Spice Girls, the Rolling Stones, Dolly Parton, Motorhead and Rainbow.

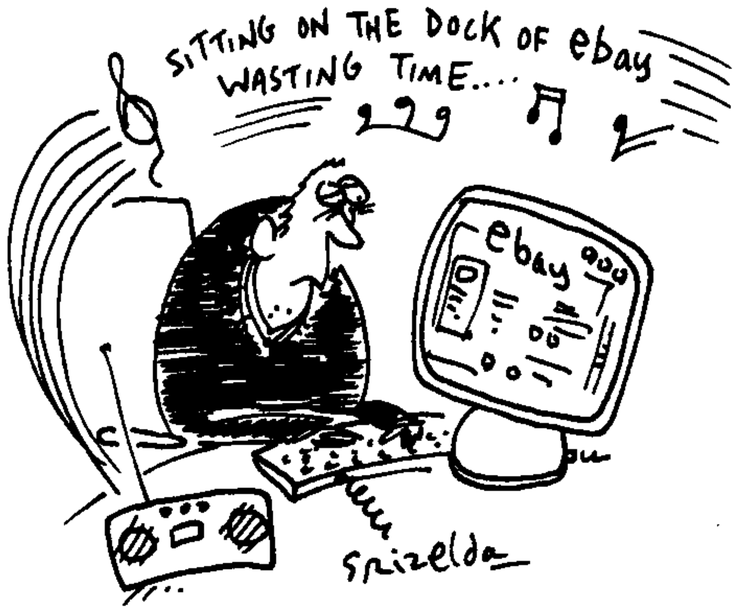
Of the 130 or so songs played, only 14 would have been allowed on Parfitt's strictly-regulated daytime playlist; and an overwhelming majority were at least 10 or more years old. With a 100 percent approval rate on the station's much-hyped internet message boards – "producers take note: the demographic audience don't like this diet of only new stuff", wrote one poster – might Parfitt and colleagues consider playing what their listeners want to hear all the time instead of as a one-off?

WHEN the respected DJ Geoff Schumann was sacked from London radio station Choice FM in March, there was outrage in the black community. Even Lee Jasper, policy director for equality and policing in the London mayor's office, denounced the dismissal as "indefensible... He has my 100 percent personal support in what must be a difficult time for him."

Oh yeah? An email leaked from Lee Jasper's office and dated October 2003 suggests Jasper must in that case have had a dramatic change of heart. Addressed to a selection of directors at Choice FM, it complained about Geoff Schumann and called for something to be done about him.

Jasper's animosity for Schumman stemmed from one of Schumann's call-in shows in which Jasper featured.

Once Schumann had lost his job, however, Lee Jasper's antipathy towards suddenly turned to deep-felt sympathy. Whether the love will continue now Schumann has a new job on BBC Radio London remains to be seen.



Warballs

"A British government scientist who has been to Iraq and worked in the field of chemical and biological warfare was invited to talk to the ladies at Bosham WI to make sure they know exactly what to do in the event of a terrorist strike." — *Chichester Observer.*

"Fears of terrorism have been blamed for plunging sales of that American icon the Stetson. The company which makes them is closing its largest factory in St Joseph, Missouri. Stetson boss Al Luiz says Westerners are hanging on to their old hats rather than buying £100 new ones. 'Those who buy Western wear tend to be conservative in their buying, and they hunkered down financially after 11 September,' he said." — *Daily Mail.*

"If there is a serious terrorist occurrence in London, clearly the consumer market is just going to die. To be seen next to gruesome editorial is very detrimental to a brand." — Nick Walker, a managing partner at Walker Media, quoted in *Media Week.*

LUVVIES

"What I felt I had to do was be the eyes of the audience," he told us. "You have to flirt with the camera. Make love to it. Make it laugh. I used to watch myself turning my head away from the camera, until I learned better. Now I use the camera as a window through which I pass to the people..."

JEREMY IRONS
TV Times

Submitted by Marty Coates

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

AD NAUSEAM

CAPITAL radio's enthusiasm for its new breakfast show presenter Johnny Vaughan knows no bounds.

It has spent more than £1m to fill what seems like every TV ad break in the London area with an all-singing, all-dancing extravaganza that sees the new boy perform "Maybe it's because I'm a Londoner..." in front of a series of the city landmarks.

Sadly the budget didn't extend to getting the locations right. While Vaughan sings about how much he loves the Tate, most Londoners can spot that he is doing so from the Sainsbury Wing of the National Gallery.

BEST new product launch of the fortnight was surely from Wolfstir Drinks, which has just launched an alcopop called Shake it, Twist it, Drink it – or STD, as it is labelled.

The company claims that like so many other STDs, this one originated in the Balearic Islands and that its name will be "appealing to the target market". The ad campaign ("Great to share"? "Almost as much fun as the clap"?) is awaited with interest.

CRITICS IN CON-TEXT

"Fans of [Alyson] Hannigan and [Luke] Perry will be ecstatic," gush posters for the TV-star-transfer vehicle *When Harry Met Sally*, currently playing in the West End.

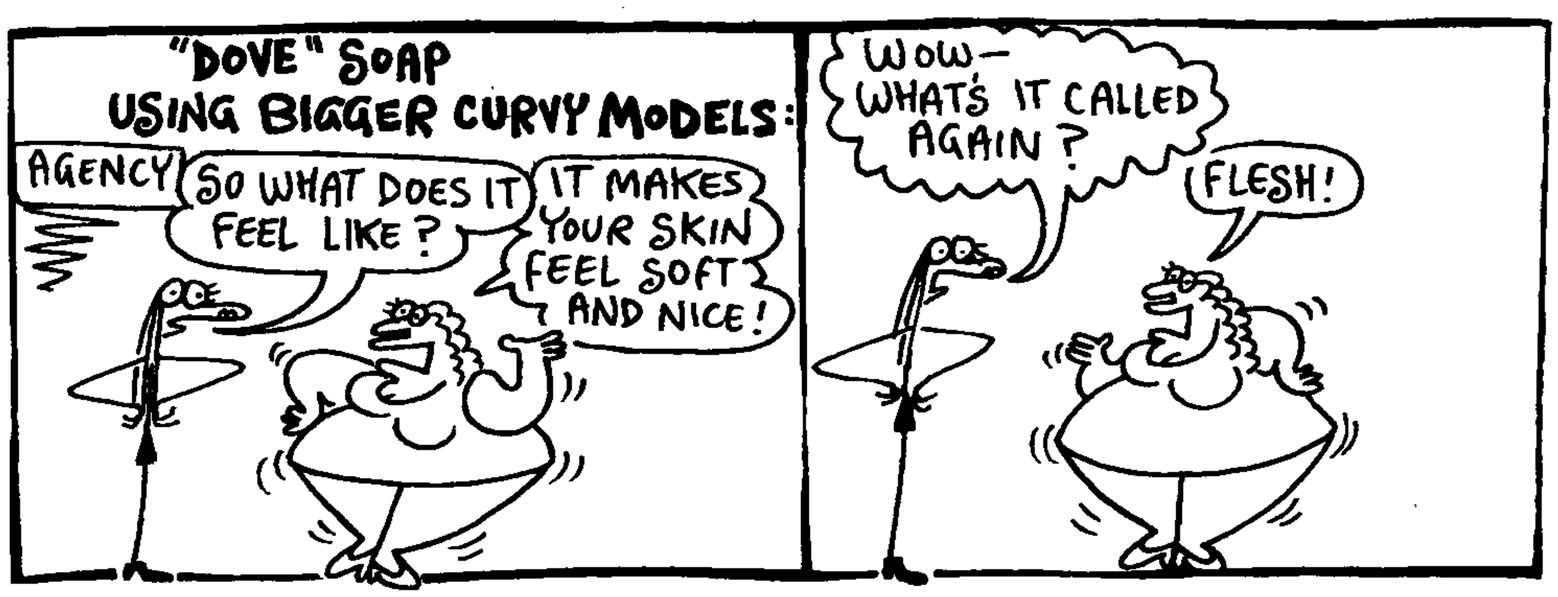
The quote is attributed to London's *Time Out* magazine. But, oddly, the advert doesn't carry the rest of the phrase – "their companions will just have to fake an interest" – or the opinion of reviewer Jane Edwardes that it is "a long and tedious play" and that "half way through I began to wish that Harry and Sally had never met."

RON ATKINSON IS THE KING OF FOOTBALL COMMENTARY – BUT YOU NEVER KNOW WHAT HE'S GOING TO SAY NEXT

View Magazine for Specsavers Opticians

SUPERMODELS

KERBER



DOING THE ROUNDS

Secret drug trials and HRT

IN 1977 Sir Richard Doll, the epidemiologist who has saved millions of lives by proving that smoking causes lung cancer and heart disease, co-wrote an editorial in the *British Medical Journal* demanding that the results of all clinical trials be made public, and not just those the pharmaceutical industry wishes us to see.

As a pioneer of the randomised controlled trial (RCT), he recognised the dangers of selection bias and the importance of assessing all the evidence when considering the risks and benefits of new drugs. So why, nearly 30 years on, are companies still allowed to keep the effects of licensed drugs secret?

The damage such secrecy does is well documented. Back in 1980, the Finnish researcher Elina Hemminki showed that among studies submitted for new drug licences, those that found side effects were less likely to be published. For more than a decade heart attack patients were given drugs to prevent heart rhythm disturbance – until it was discovered in 1990 that they were killing more Americans each year than died in Vietnam. If the evidence had not been buried from the start, the tragedy could well have been avoided.

Recently M.D. highlighted that anti-depressant medication is less powerful, and has more side effects, than the selective release of trial information by the drug industry would have us believe. There is now clear evidence from the Swedish Medical Products Agency of this biased reporting favouring new drugs. Without compulsory publication of all trials from the outset, we often have to wait decades for the truth to emerge via the slow and haphazard reporting of adverse events.

The most recent "scare" into the safety of hormone replacement therapy (HRT) is a case in point. The potential HRT market is vast, with a woman living on average 30 years after the menopause. HRT has been used since the 1950s, but it took nearly 30 years to spot the increased risk of womb cancer from oestrogen-only drugs. Progestogen was added in the 1980s, and these combined preparations have been among the most heavily marketed in history.

A flawed, but at the time convincing, observational study of 120,000 nurses provided evidence that HRT was not only good for relieving menopausal symptoms (it is) but that it also might protect against heart disease[1]. This important benefit was thought to far outweigh the possible slight increase in the risk of breast cancer.

Every other page in the medical press seemed to contain an absurd advert for HRT. Campaign symbols included a hair dryer (Kliofem), a chained suffragette (Evorel), a dancing saxophonist (Premique) and, most unwisely, a gaping pink oyster (Estring). Nearly all post-menopausal women were encouraged to give HRT a try.

Five years ago I spoke (and lost) at a drug-sponsored debate to oppose the mass medicalisation of the menopause. Opposing me was Professor David Purdie, a consultant gynaecologist, who spoke of HRT as a great achievement. "There are oestrogen receptors all over the body, and HRT in those who need it has benefits for bone, heart, arteries, mental and nervous function which greatly outweigh the increased risks."

Supporting me was Dr Ellen Grant, who observed that "the time course of the breast cancer epidemic in developed countries correlates uncomfortably well with the changes in sex hormone prescribing." Alas, it took until 2002 to prove it, when a large randomised controlled trial – the only safe way to assess new drugs – found evidence that combined HRT increases the risk of breast cancer, coronary heart disease, stroke and venous clots[2]. A subsequent huge study in the *Lancet* last year found that combined HRT may double the risk of breast cancer for long-term use and of heart disease in the first year of use.[3]

The drug industry is now desperately ferreting around for unreliable evidence from smaller trials that select sub-groups of women may be safe on HRT, but this misses the point entirely. The evidence of the risks of HRT has been around for years but well hidden. Hemminki and Oxford epidemiologist Klim McPherson, distrustful of the bias in observational studies, meticulously analysed all the available randomised controlled trials on HRT and published their results in 1997[4]. They found that HRT did not protect against heart disease, and if anything increased the risk. The findings were ridiculed by HRT experts and dismissed as being selective as they didn't have access to all the studies.

So they tried to gain access to the unpublished data, but only managed to in Finland via the high court. In the UK they were not able to access the secret trial data of drug companies, even though it affects the health of millions of women. However, the six unpublished Finnish trials showed that the relative increased risk of heart disease on combined HRT was 1.78, which matches well with the results of the large RCT finally published five years later.

In America, the conservative estimate is that each year, combined HRT is responsible for 1,400 cases of breast cancer, 1,200 cases of heart disease, and 1,400 cases of stroke — against 860 fewer hip fractures and 1,000 fewer cases of colorectal cancer. There is no doubt it relieves symptoms of the menopause, which in some women can be very distressing; but it is equally true that millions of women have made misinformed choices for several decades. And no one ever died of a hot flush. The lessons are simple and unchanged since Doll first advocated them: randomised controlled trials are the best way to assess the risks and benefits of drugs, but only if all of them are made public.

M.D.

[1] Nurses' Health Study. Postmenopausal hormone therapy and mortality. *N Engl J Med* 1997; 336: 1769-75.

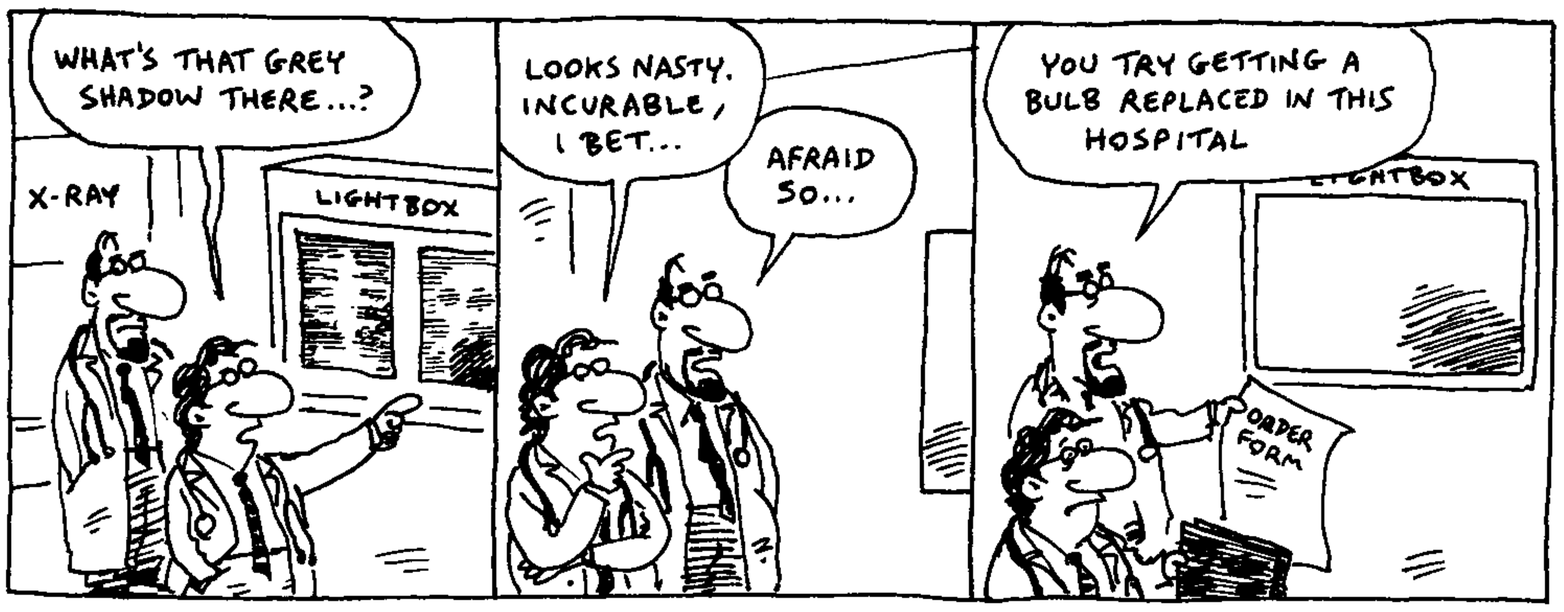
[2] Writing Group of the Women's Health Initiative. Risks and benefits of oestrogen plus progestin in healthy postmenopausal women. *JAMA* 2002;288: 942-5.

[3] Million Women Study Collaborators. Breast cancer and hormone-replacement therapy in the million women study. *Lancet* 2003; 362: 419-27.

[4] Hemminki E, McPherson K. Impact of postmenopausal hormone therapy on cardiovascular events and cancer: pooled data from clinical trials. *BMJ* 1997; 315:149-53.

off your trolley

REEVE & WAY



DOWN ON THE FARM

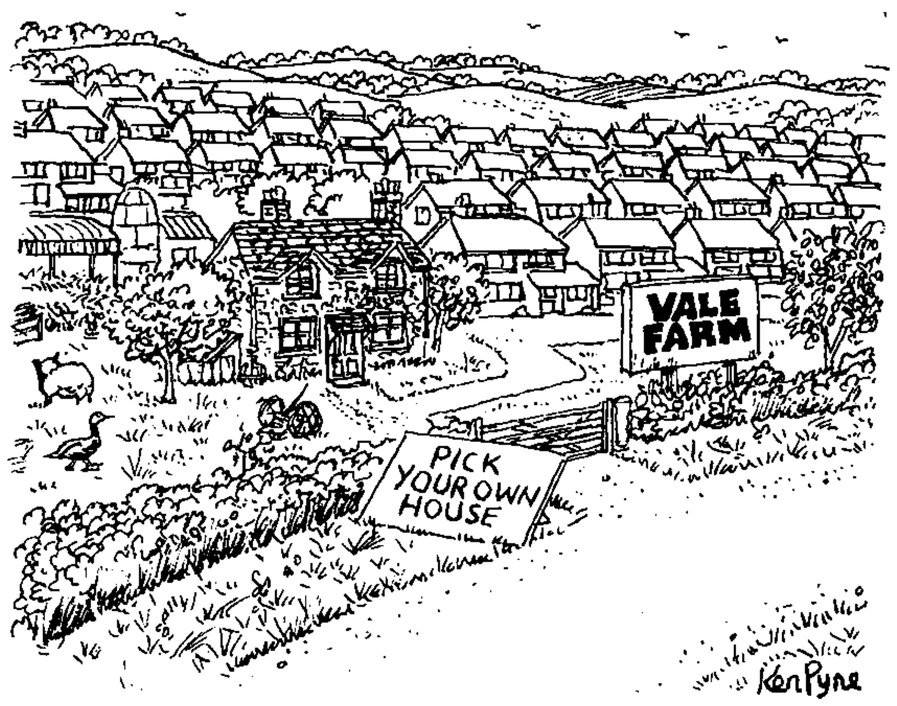
Joined-up government

THE 200 MPs who put down an early-day motion begging Tony Blair to give them the bill to ban hunting for which they have been clamouring so long little realise how embarrassing this could be for Defra (the Department for the Elimination of Farming and Rural Affairs).

It is now a year since regulations came into force to comply with the European Union's "animal by-products" directive making it a criminal offence for farmers to bury dead animals on their land. Previously, whenever cattle, sheep, pigs or poultry died of natural causes, it was customary either to leave their corpses as food for wildlife or to bury them to feed the worms.

The EU found this a messy practice which might spread disease. So it decided that henceforth all fallen stock would be collected from the farm, taken to a rendering plant to be boiled down to powder and then incinerated. The only problem was that there was no system for collecting more than a million dead animals a year from Britain's farms. Nor were there nearly enough rendering plants or incinerators that comply with the EU's ever-stricter anti-pollution rules.

From 1 May 2003, therefore, we saw the farcical situation where Brussels and Defra had made it a criminal offence to bury fallen stock on the farm, but where there was no arrangement to allow them to do anything else. For months Defra kept promising it would soon have its "national disposal scheme" up and running. Meanwhile thousands of farmers had to break the law and continue to do something they had been harmlessly doing for thousands of years.



There were, however, two other ways in which most farmers have traditionally disposed of huge quantities of dead cattle, sheep and pigs: by having them picked up by the local knacker or hunt kennels, to be fed to the hounds. The problem with knackers' yards is that, thanks to thickets of new regulations, most have now gone out of business. Much of Britain's countryside no longer now has a knacker within 100 miles. This leaves only the hunt kennels – a fact which has not escaped Defra officials desperately trying to find a way round the impasse.

Defra's latest projections for its disposal scheme show it can only work through the co-operation of the 186 premises approved by Defra to collect fallen stock – of which 93 are hunts. So when Defra's scheme is finally in place, exactly half the premises on which it will rely to collect and dispose of fallen stock will be hunt kennels. Then along come all those anti-hunting MPs to whom foxhounds are the spawn of the devil (second only to the hunters themselves), clamouring for a speedy end to the only activity which can save Defra from the shambles.

If Mr Blair caves in, Defra will have to admit that there is no way the Brussels ban can be made to work and the government will face a gigantic fine from the European Commission.

'Muckspreader'

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

THAT'S RITCHIE

SEEMINGLY oblivious to the blows suffered to his long career on Southwark council, Cllr Tony "three-in-a-bed" Ritchie (*Eye* 1103) has returned from his Thailand bar to deliver some blows of his own.

Last week, arriving late at a meeting of Camberwell community council — from which he had recently been deposed as chair — it was not long before he was disagreeing with, and trying to thump, local resident Joseph Healey. Later, outside the hall, he allegedly did strike another resident, Mike Anneke.

Both men are campaigning to rid the Grosvenor Estate residents association, one of Ritchie's power bases, of allegedly racist elements. Ritchie is deeply unpopular with many black people in Southwark after leading a campaign which last year saw Kids' Company, an acclaimed charity for deprived teenagers, driven out of its home under railway arches in Camberwell.

Meanwhile Ritchie's old mate, Labour opposition leader Ian Wingfield, has been accused of conducting a vendetta against Raymond Stevenson, owner of the former Imperial Gardens nightclub which was forced to close by the dodgy grant of planning permission to a flats development by Fairview Homes, now the subject of fraud inquiry by Inspector Knacker (*Eye* 1103). Stevenson, a former member of the Royal Shakespeare Company, had gained a reputation as a talent spotter, giving the band Big Brovaz their first break and encouraging young black writers such as Patrick Augustus and Alex Wheatle, whose novels have been adapted by the BBC and Channel 4.

Wingfield has alleged that an angry Stevenson threatened him in the town hall car park. But other witnesses say that Wingfield, in fact, aimed his car at Stevenson. The truth may never be established, for the council's CCTV tapes of the car park have been accidentally wiped. Coincidentally, that was the fate of a tape in Southwark's planning department last year after a council officer alleged he had been assaulted by Stevenson. Knacker viewed the tape, which proved Stevenson's innocence. Shortly afterwards it vanished. To wipe one tape is a misfortune. To wipe two looks like well-controlled carelessness.

❖❖❖

Rib Joint of Beef
(to be calved at the table)

Menu item, Harpenden Town Council Dinner

● THE LONDON borough of Barnet attracted wide publicity last month when it announced that residents who did not separate paper and glass from their rubbish could be fined up to £1,000 for failing to recycle. Will the council now prosecute itself, given that waste paper from its own Nortel Business Park offices goes straight into the bin?

STINKING FEN

POLITICOS in Lincolnshire have failed to grasp that old maxim about the wisdom of ceasing to dig when one finds oneself at the bottom of a hole.

As *Eye* 1104 reported, the county council's former Tory leader Jim Speechley was imprisoned at the beginning of April for trying to alter the route of a bypass to increase hugely the value of land he owned.

The 18-month sentence completed the disgrace of Speechley, who was forced to stand down as leader in 2002 after an auditors' inquiry condemned him for creating "a climate of fear" among staff and spending taxpayers' money on illegal payoffs. Perversely his Tory colleagues then re-elected him as leader before he was forced out. Now, even as he languishes in a prison cell, they still back the old rogue.

Lincolnshire's chief executive David Bowles, an honourable public servant who could not stomach Speechley's behaviour, stood up to his bullying, blew the whistle on the attempted bypass scam and gave evidence for the prosecution. The stress of it all has kept him off work since January. Last week he was due to return but — on the orders of new council leader Ian Croft, an old friend and supporter of Speechley – he did not. At the trial Bowles testified that Speechley's cronies had sought to have him sacked before the case. They backed off after legal advice that their actions could be portrayed as an attempt to undermine a witness. As the *Eye* went to press the stand-off continued.

● IN JANUARY *Eye* 1097 reported on the sad amnesia of Roger Stone, Labour leader of Rotherham council. He forgot that he once travelled to Yorkshire from Scotland in the car of his friend and fellow councillor Garvin Reed and not on the train for which he had claimed a £50 fare. (Reed is currently banged up for spending £150,000 of taxpayers' money on booze and prostitutes.) When his embarrassment about the claim, made in 1998, came to light last year, Stone declared that he was "happy for my record on expense claims to be subject to the closest scrutiny". He had long ago repaid the £50, he said, plus another £215 mistakenly claimed on trips to Brussels. Alas Cllr Stone's memory has again proved rusty. The district auditor has subjected his claims to the "closest scrutiny" and failed to find any evidence that the money was repaid. Poor, befuddled Stone has been required to pay up again — this time in front of witnesses.

TOUGH TALK

LAMBETH is "taking a tough line on benefit fraudsters", says the local authority rag *Municipal Journal*, noting how three residents have been fined for making false housing and council tax benefit claims. Cllr Ashley Lumsden, Lib Dem executive member for finance, told the *MJ*: "We won't tolerate those individuals who think they can get away with it."

Well, up to a point. Not long ago Lambeth council boasted the largest anti-fraud team of any London borough, with 65 staff investigating hundreds of fraud cases involving the unlawful subletting of council homes and dodgy benefit claims. Then in December 2001, after the anti-fraud team was transferred to the housing directorate from legal services, orders came from on high that housing fraud investigations should cease. After a quick "restructuring" Lambeth had one of the smallest anti-fraud teams in London, with fewer than 10 staff.

A year later management consultants PriceWaterhouseCoopers (PWC) issued a report warning councillors that Lambeth was slipping back into its bad old ways, with a "culture of non-compliance". A further report by PWC, presented to councillors last month, gave further comfort to the borough's hundreds of fraudsters. It notes that that the number of cases under investigation has fallen as hard-pressed staff are forced to concentrate on "quick win" cases, rather than complex frauds perpetrated by criminal gangs. In other words the minnows are netted, leaving the big fish the run of the pond. How "tough" is that?

● FOR MONTHS Leeds city council has been justifying the felling of hundreds of mature trees in beautiful Roundhay Park on the grounds that the cull would improve views towards the park's glorious Waterloo Lake from the Mansion Hotel, a popular council-owned venue for weddings and other functions. Last week, the handsome Mansion, built in 1818, closed its doors to business pending refurbishment. It was only after the trees had been axed that the authority revealed its future plans for the building: it is to be turned into council offices. Who would begrudge the philistines their lovely view?

BRENT FLEECE

BRENT council is facing questions about how it managed to lose around three quarters of a million pounds in a local property deal that shafted a successful charity-run sports centre.

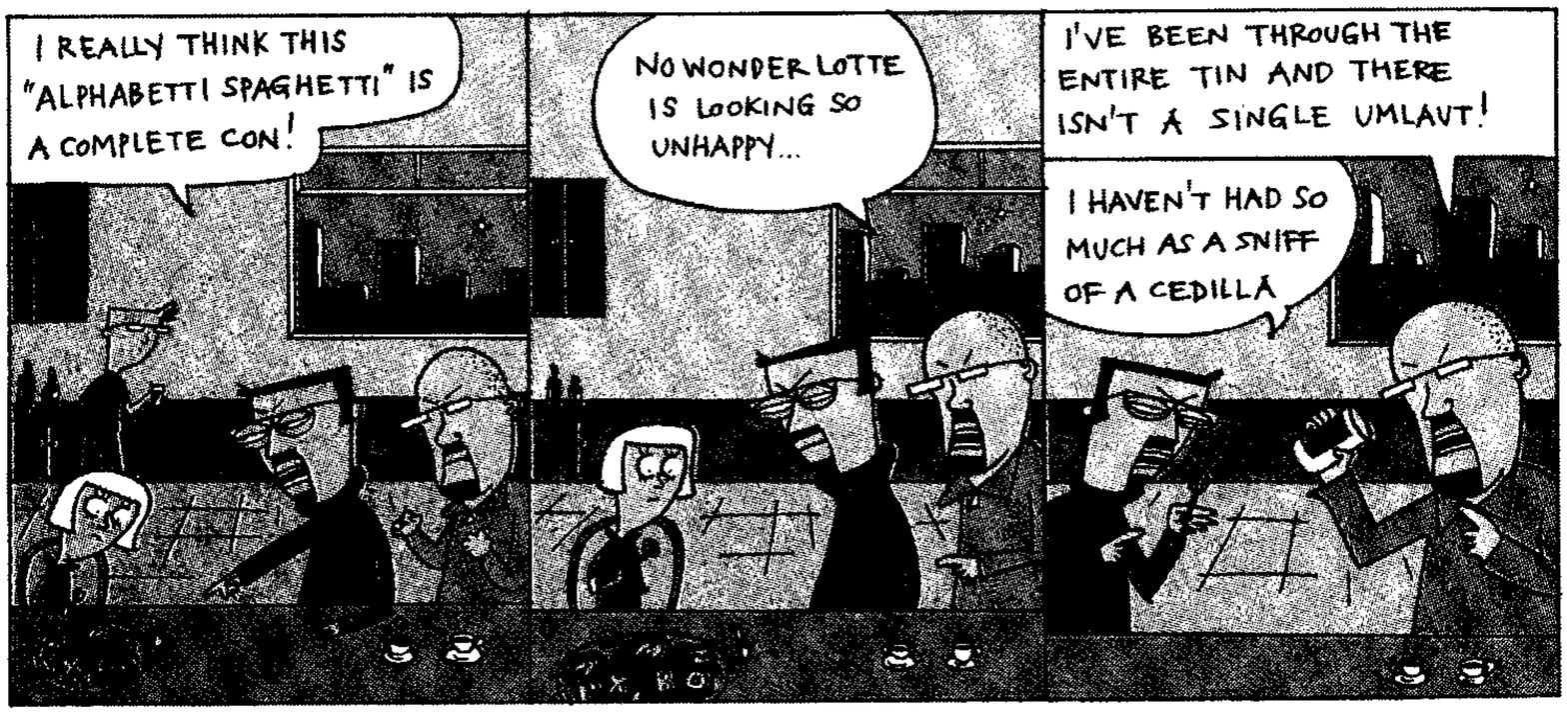
Kinnor, a small Jewish charity in north London, started renting land from the council at Stag Lane, Kingsbury, in 1976 at an annual rent of £350, later raised to £600. With small amounts of money from the government and council, the charity managed to build a thriving community and sports centre with squash courts, a sports hall, table tennis and a canteen.

The centre was very popular and used by up to 600 people a week. But in 1999 trustees of the Kinnor charity were dismayed to hear that Brent council had decided to sell the centre's freehold. It was bought at auction for £46,000 by Warborough Investments Ltd, part of the empire of Paul and Simon Upward, who own and run the Ocobase Group which, according to the *Sunday Times* rich list, makes them worth around £40m.

The new landlords immediately imposed a new rent of £35,000 a year, which Kinnor could not possibly pay. So the charity surrendered the lease and its workers were evicted. A few months later, Warborough sold the "unencumbered" freehold of the building for a whopping £780,000 — and then proceeded to sue the trustees and even the voluntary charity workers for half a million pounds more because of dilapidations and unpaid rent.

Their case was chucked out in the chancery court by acting judge William Blair QC (Tony's older brother), but individuals involved in the charity still face the threat of further legal action by the company. They are puzzled by the behaviour of Brent which appears to have lost roughly £750,000 on the deal and no one can work out why.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON KNIFE & PACKER


I REALLY THINK THIS "ALPHABETTI SPAGHETTI" IS A COMPLETE CON!
NO WONDER LOTTE IS LOOKING SO UNHAPPY...
I'VE BEEN THROUGH THE ENTIRE TIN AND THERE ISN'T A SINGLE UMLAUT!
I HAVEN'T HAD SO MUCH AS A SNIFF OF A CEDILLA

NOOKS and CORNERS

IN WHOSE interests does the Crown Estate act? It's certainly not to the credit of the monarchy nor to the benefit of London. It has now set its greedy eyes on sites tucked away off the Quadrant of Regent Street and the famous Regent Palace Hotel, which has been providing reasonably priced accommodation for almost 90 years.

The hotel is profitable and its owners are perfectly happy with the building. But the Crown lease is about to expire and the Crown Estate proposes to make much more money out of the site by demolishing the hotel with its 1,000-plus rooms and replace it with a luxury five-star establishment with just 150 beds designed by those safe, establishment modernists, Allies 'n' Morrison.

Both the Twentieth Century Society and SAVE Britain's Heritage are vehemently opposed, as well they might be: it is thoroughly bad news for London. The Regent Palace was designed in 1912 by the official government architect Sir Henry Tanner working with W.J. Ansell. Its loosely Edwardian Baroque facades are not of stone but faced in white faience. The intention of the promoters was "to make the luxuries usually available to the very rich open to the less well-off." The hotel opened in 1915 and soon became a necessary place of resort for officers on leave from the awfulness of the Western Front, its two miles of corridors facilitating the sort of activities described in Arnold Bennett's wartime novel, *The Pretty Lady*.

The hotel is not listed, and the Department of Culture, Media 'n' Sport has yet to respond to a request that it be considered for designation. It surely ought to be, not least because the Regent Palace is significant in the social history of London. It also deserves listing for the later, remarkable Deco interiors of 1934-35 designed by the great Oliver P. Bernard, that leading designer of the 1930s (and father of the late Jeffry and Bruce).

The creators of the Regent Palace were Salmon & Gluckstein, who owned other hotels as well as the corner-houses of J. Lyons & Co., for many of the interiors of which Bernard was responsible. Bernard's spectacular entrance to the Strand Palace Hotel was stupidly removed in 1968 (and recently partially resurrected in the V&A's *Deco* exhibition); the great thing about his bars and restaurant in the Regent Palace Hotel — The Atlantic Bar and Grill, the Titanic Bar and Dick's Bar — is that they are still there and still in use.

Irritated by opposition to his firm's visionary and lucrative proposals, Graham Morrison claims that ways of saving and retaining the Bernard rooms are being investigated. But that is not the point: the huge Regent Palace Hotel as a whole deserves to survive. The building is not run down or redundant, it is profitable and it provides a most useful service in the heart of London. Indeed, there is a political argument against redevelopment, concerning the provision of reasonably priced accommodation. Is it really desirable to have the centre of London as the preserve of the very rich? The greedy Crown Estate should to leave the Regent Palace Hotel alone.

I AM sorry but not surprised to learn that English Heritage is under more financial pressure from this most philistine of Labour governments.

EH is getting less and less money and the consequence is another stupid management reorganisation, with redundancies and proposals to "privatise" the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments (RCHM).

The first victim of all this may be the Survey of London — unless mayor Ken Livingstone takes it on. He ought to: firstly because it used to be run by the London County Council and then the GLC until rescued by English Heritage; and, secondly, because it was founded in 1894 by a socialist, C.R. Ashbee, in pursuit of the belief of that great man, William Morris, that historic buildings matter and belong to all the people.

The first volumes of the Survey concentrated on the East End and not on grand houses. But does Ken care about recording the ordinary buildings of the city? We shall see.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Currys, Brentford*

Submitted by Helen Minter. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

BRITISH newspapers have never been known for their judgement in covering arts news stories, but the bizarrely naïve guff that accompanied last week's launch of Raymond Gubbay's Savoy Opera took some beating.

This not terribly significant event was trumpeted in leader columns, on TV and – all hail! – on the *Today* programme too as a "revolution in the stalls" that would "fling down a gauntlet to the official arts", deliver a sharp slap in the face to "bow-tied aesthetes" and replace them with a brave new audience of "working men and women". All of which was tosh.

The *Telegraph* even managed to tell its readers that Savoy Opera is "the world's only privately funded [opera] company" – which will be news to Glyndebourne, Garsington, Grange Park and several dozen touring companies in the UK alone, most of which are far more "revolutionary" than Gubbay.

The truth is that Savoy Opera is simply a commercial venture designed to make the wealthy Mr Gubbay even wealthier. There's nothing wrong with that – or the fact that he has a substantial property in the South of France, an apartment in Paris and an impressive antiques collection. But it doesn't make him the great public benefactor his press releases and an army of gullible hacks would have the public believe.

And he is far from "revolutionary" too. With most tickets in the £40-£50 bracket, his shows are no cheaper than those at ENO (where the bottom price of £8 is *less* than Gubbay's) or at Opera North, Scottish Opera and a host of other ventures. Far from being for "working men and women", his audience tends to be full of Hooray Henries from Fulham who are dressed to the nines and giving their girlfriends what they fondly imagine is The Glyndebourne Experience.

In terms of artistry, it is nothing of the sort, of course. Gubbay has cut every corner going, with the result that his opening shows have had thumbs-down reviews ("heavy-handed… slipshod… ragged", "toe-curlingly ham", "more like a student performance than a professional one") from critics whose words are at odds with those of the leader writers.

One conspicuous exception to this critical dismay came in the London *Evening Standard*, which ran a cloying arts page eulogy to Gubbay. Oddly it didn't dwell on the fact that the *Standard* is also a sponsor of the Savoy shenanigans, so it's hardly surprising its critic liked them.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Can you believe it? Jack Vettriano's "The Singing Butler" made three quarters of a million at auction!
Doesn't surprise me, with so many mugs around nowadays.
GUARDIAN ARTS

10.00 Pornography: a Secret History of Civilisation: this final programme looks at the era of digital manipulation

Radio Times

Letters

Jeering Al-Jazeera

Sir,

I am a UK citizen of Iraqi origin and have been a keen reader of Private Eye for many years. I have supported the war on Iraq as it was the only option available for removing the dictatorship in Iraq. I have been in Iraq recently after 21 years of exile and can assure you that despite all the difficulties, the majority of Iraqis are happy with the change in Iraq, oppose the violence of the insurgents and feel optimistic about the future of Iraq.

I note with regret that you keep attacking Bush and Blair regarding the war in Iraq despite the fact that the coalition forces, supported by so many countries, are doing their best to help establish democracy in Iraq. You even had space to publish alleged corruption by the INC but you never seem to bother mentioning anything about the dark forces of Muqtada Al-Sadr, the former regime agents and the Al-Qaeda agents who have already caused huge suffering in Iraq and who intend to turn the country back to the days of tyranny.

More importantly, you never mention anything about the negative rule of most of the Arab media, particularly Al-Jazeera, and their direct colluding with the insurgents. This was clearly evident in recent pictures of kidnapping of foreign hostages. I find this surprising from a satirical paper which keeps a watchful eye on what other media outlets publish.

AMIR RAHIM,

London.

The Easter story

Sir,

Remote Controller is quite right about the religious content over Easter, but BBC2 didn't devote two programmes to Colditz on Good Friday; the film of The Colditz Story was cancelled to make way for the highly religious experience of watching the Great Britain Davis Cup tennis team. I'm still not sure whether they expected a crucifixion or a resurrection.

Yours,
PETER FOX,

Via email.

Big Ben

Sir,

I wish to defend the good name of Ben Verwaayen, BT's CEO (Eye 1004, p9, Oh Yeah?) There are several reported incidences of his personal intervention in matters following an email to him from customers stuck with problems getting broadband services.

ben.verwaayen@bt.com is the address. Perhaps this is where he gets his customer contact from.

PHIL THOMPSON,

Peterborough.

● *Thanks for other letters confirming the personal treatment of BT customer problems by Ben Verwaayen. Ed.*

Rambling on

Sir,

Muckspreader, in his 2 April column, seems only concerned with painting walkers as criminals. Walkers visit the countryside to walk, criminals commit crimes and are subject to criminal justice as a result. The Countryside and Rights of Way Act does not change this.

Under the act landowners will have reduced liability for accidents that happen on their land. If insurance companies see fit to increase their premiums because of the introduction of the new access, this has nothing to do with the realities of the legislation.

Walkers already contribute over £6bn to the rural economy in England and Wales, supporting upwards of 250,000 rural jobs. By opening some of our most beautiful landscapes to walkers – mountain, moor, heath, down and common land – the CroW Act can only further stimulate rural tourism and greater economic growth within rural communities.

Yours sincerely,
NICKY WARDEN,

Head of Freedom to Roam, The Ramblers' Assoc.

Proof negative

Sir,

So Robert Dixon wrote the Penguin Book of Curious and Interesting Geometry, did he? I don't think so – because I am the author. It does contain the image used by Damien Hirst, however, reproduced with permission.

Yours sincerely,
DAVID WELLS,

Via email.

Brassed off

Sir,

Thank-you for the plugs for BBC Music Magazine – as your correspondent says, it's the world's leading classical music magazine. But I think he has been sitting too close to the brass section, and is a bit fuddled. Needless to say, we wouldn't have gone to all the trouble of establishing a business dedicated to publishing outstanding specialist magazines, as a complicated ruse to close one of them. I think he needs to get out more.

Yours sincerely,
PETER PHIPPEN,

BBC Magazines.

Lookalike

Scream

Johnson

Sir,

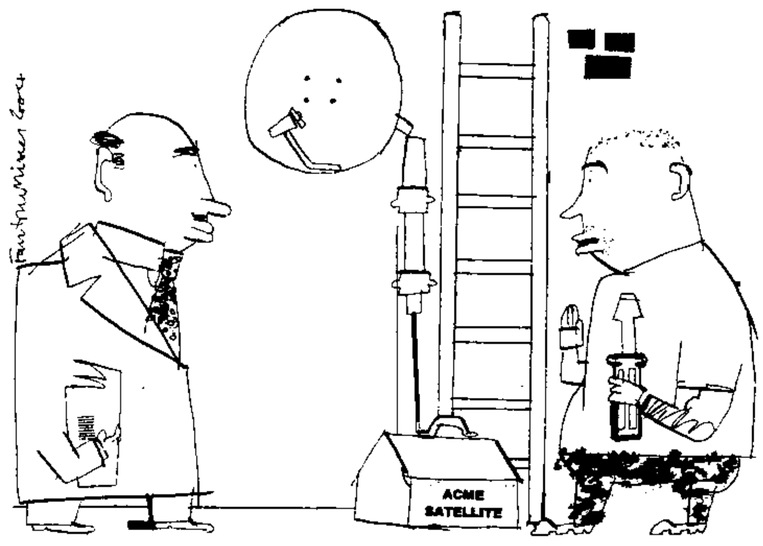
Has anyone else noticed the remarkable resemblance between Boris Johnson MP and Edvard Munch's 'The Scream'?

Apart from their hairstyles, could they be related?

Yours sincerely,
BRIAN LEEDHAM,

West Ewell, Surrey.

Scenes You Seldom See



"A conservation area? Sorry, mate, I'll take it down at once"

Tram lines

Sir,

Your correspondent who points out the obvious fact that buses are cheaper to provide than trams rather misses the point. The object of investing in tram systems is not to provide gold-plated transport for bus passengers but to attract out of their cars motorists who wouldn't be seen dead on a bus. There is substantial evidence that this works with a consequent reduction in congestion and pollution. It's just a matter of what kind of world we want to live in. And before anyone points it out, I do realise that just banning cars from cities and making the buggers use buses would be even cheaper. But it doesn't seem to be quite so popular as having trams.

Sincerely,
HOWARD RYE,

London E17.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"Sleeping with David Beckham was a momentous day for me, not just a one-night stand..."
SARAH MARBECK
(J. Bunker)

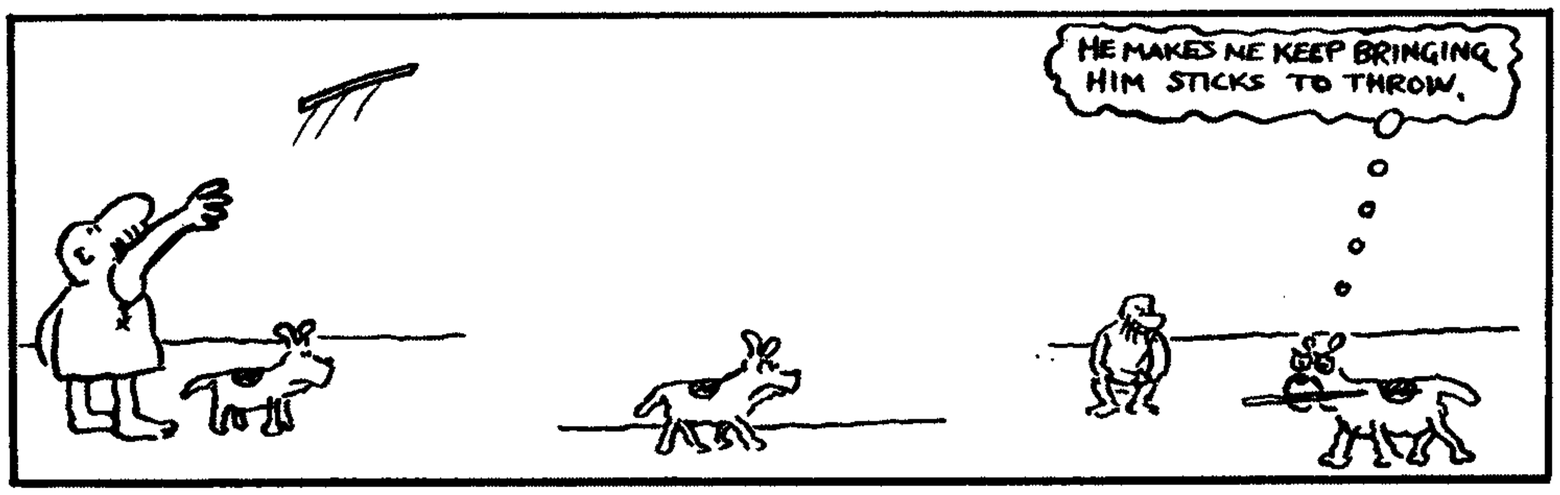
"He's got his faith, his health and his family – but, more importantly, he's got a gold medal."
JAMIE THEAKSTON, Channel 4
(Peter Crespin)

"He [Milner] seems to be holding his shoulder, in the shoulder area."
GRAHAM TAYLOR, Radio 5 Live
(Brian Black)

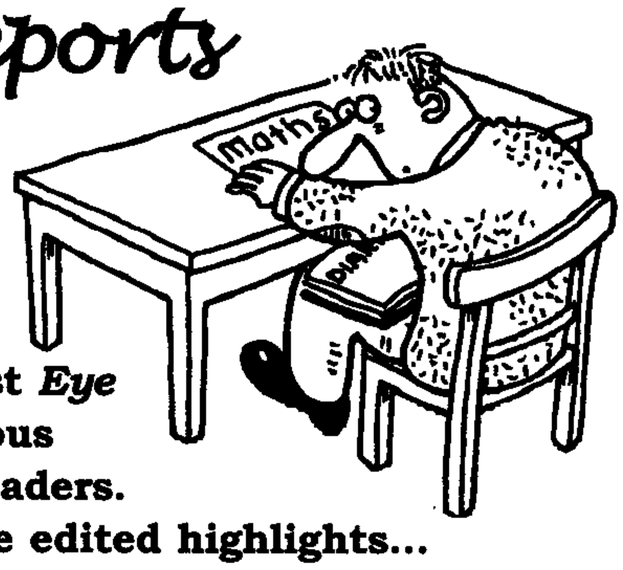
"For nearly all the season we've been in the top half of the table and for most of the season better than that."
ALAN CURBISHLEY, Radio 5 Live
(John Last)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



School Reports



The Education Special, *The Secret Diary of a School Teacher*, which accompanied the last *Eye* provoked an enormous reaction from our readers. Here are some of the edited highlights...

A*

At last! Someone who tells it as it is. Your piece should be published in every newspaper and all the cabinet should be forced to read it. I gave up teaching precisely because I couldn't stand the frustration of dealing with that sort of behaviour on a daily basis.

MICHAEL TAYLOR

...As a special needs teacher who spent hours in Maths classes like the ones he described I can only say how true it all sounds.

R. BECKETT

...I am currently undertaking a Post Graduate Certificate in Education and I am in the second of my two placement schools. The continual grind of low-level insubordination in the classroom saps the will and motivation of the best intentioned. And that is before the politics and bureaucracy take their toll. After only six months in the system, I will not be applying for a teaching post.

NAME AND ADDRESS SUPPLIED

The Secret Diary touched upon a hidden shame of the profession: we no longer control the classes we teach. On a diet of aggressive television where all social interactions are harsh and confrontational (EastEnders, Kilroy, Hollyoaks, etc) the children feel that is the way to behave.

Charles Clarke [secretary of state for education] says the answer is for us to make our lessons more interesting. In a single week I might dress up, record mock TV shows, act out role-plays, compose songs, work the class as a "human line" and create animation. This isn't the answer. The answer is the reverse. It is to have lessons which are "old school", which show the importance of discipline, of working as a team and which punish those who disrupt the common goal. We need to teach writing, mathematics and common responsibility. We aren't entertainers, we are teachers.

I would sign my name, but my Headteacher's draconian regime would hunt me down and kill me.

A. NOTHER TEACHER

...In my own school what finally makes me break down and cry is the quiet child who sits through all the abuse and sexual garbage littered throughout every lesson and break, six hours a day, five days a week, and comes to me at the end of the lesson and says: "What was that X squared, miss?" He is the one I have flashbacks remembering at two in the morning.

A. MATHS TEACHER

My wife is a teacher in just such a "bog-standard comprehensive", in a leafy and ostensibly well-to-do Dorset suburb. She was unable to read the whole diary, so painfully close to her own experience was it. She too is a dedicated and highly-regarded teacher, who just wants the chance to do her job properly, but it is not possible. So we are now relocating to another part of the country, just so she can work in a school (still state, but run by the Catholic church), where teachers are able to teach and do not have to fire fight, crisis manage, or push paper daily...

PETER GALLON

...As a Head of Year, what I tend to find in my position is the obduracy and outright selfishness of a significant number of parents, who appear to view any attempt by the school to modify their offspring's behaviour as an infringement upon their (usually minimal) parenting skills...

PAUL SHILLITO

...I am told that I am accountable for my actions in the classroom, which is fair enough, but I do wish someone would remind the class that they are equally responsible.

At least I know I am not alone.

ANDREW CRYSELL

I have been teaching for 30 years, 10 as a primary head teacher, and I can assure you, as I assure anyone who will listen to such a silly old bore, that standards have not risen one jot in any school as a result of the actions of government.

Why, in a free society, should education be compulsory? Let those who choose not to cooperate get out and leave schools for those who want to be there. Mind you, that's most of the teachers out!

RICHARD DEVNEY

I am currently studying for A-levels at a girls' grammar school with a highly selective sixth form. As such, one would imagine that my school experience has been extremely sheltered, and that I should have been aghast when I read your report. However, what I read resonated with behaviour I witness in the classroom on a daily basis, from students who have *chosen* to be here. As I see it, this kind of behaviour is not just obnoxious, but at risk of sounding like a whingeing teenager, extremely unfair. Unfair on the teacher who just tries to do their job. Unfair on the few members of the class who are trying to learn. Unfair that there will be questions in the exams that I will be unable to answer, since the teacher has been unable to complete the syllabus in any significant detail.

ANON

...One of the best articles I've read in Private Eye during the last 10 years. Eighteen years ago I attended a "bog standard comprehensive" and ended up at Cambridge University doing engineering. I'm not sure this would be possible now.

The company I work for has great difficulty recruiting competent engineers, and a lot of applicants are incapable of solving basic mathematical problems that should be taught at A-level or earlier. Perhaps it's time to give some rights back to the teachers and run schools in a strict style similar to the recent "That'll Teach Them" television series?

MATT HUBBARD

...Our political leaders lecture us about how creating a market in education based on "choice" is the way to go. Your diarist's school is almost certainly at the bottom of its local pecking order which "choice" helped produce, and no other school will take the offenders. When the Ridings School in Halifax was taken over by an Ofsted-backed "super-head" in the mid-1990s, his first move was to ship out the worst troublemakers, something his hapless predecessors had not been allowed to do. Don't solve the problem, just move it on somewhere else. Tragically, this is now Labour as well as Tory policy. Simply pretend that all parents have the choice to get their kids out and the problem will go away.

FRANCIS R. FOX

"A. Teacher" confirms what most adults have suspected for some time: that modern education is fine for students of above average self-motivation, self-discipline and intelligence, but damns the rest. So what do the political parties have to say in this great democracy of ours?

A web search reveals that Labour thinks everything is fine (thanks to them), the Tories have two pages of guarded and unconvincing waffle to offer; and the Lib Dems want bazillions more trained teachers but fail to

explain how they are going to magic up the necessary numbers to fill such an unrewarding job.

Oh, but hang on, here we go: "restore discipline in the classroom", "give authority back to teachers" — this is more like it. Small snag, though: this comes from a party called the BNP. If the major parties want to kick the BNP off the field, they need to understand why they're gaining ground.

TOM ARCHER

As a former long-serving and long-suffering member of the "teaching profession" I had many memories rekindled by *The Secret Diary of a School Teacher*. One thing puzzled me, however: why did A. Teacher choose to write only about his *good* classes?

HOWARD MARSHALL

Private Eye is supposed to be funny. It made me cry today...

CERI WILLIAMS

Must try harder

...I am a teacher with 10 years' experience in the inner city. Your diarist showed virtually no sign of actually *liking* any of the children he taught, and to be effective you have to like them as well as manage them in class. Although his lessons had basic "planning and resourcing", they were clearly grimly boring and the kids responded to this. They also clearly responded to his negative approach to them — they're very good at noticing when you don't like them; many are used to it from home. Low expectations consistently give low results.

Your diarist gives an honest appraisal of himself and his experiences. He clearly identifies serious growing issues in education. He has, however, failed to identify the most important issue for him: he's in the wrong job.

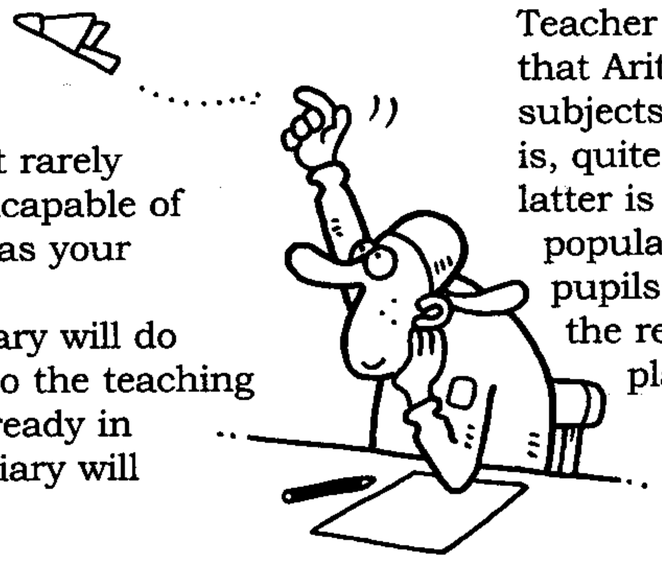
DEZ MALANDAIN

...I have taught science in four schools, and A. Teacher has clearly missed the point. Students come to school for two main reasons. Firstly to eat as much food and to drink as much mineral water as they can, before dropping the wrappers, bottles and half-eaten remains on the floor. Secondly to socialize with their friends (sorry, mates), a process which increasingly consists of staring blankly into space as they grow older. Pens, books and so on have no place in any of this, so why bother to bring them? This does not mean that students have no opinions. If I remind them why they are there, they will tell me that I am "getting in a stress" or occasionally to "piss off". If I persist, their parents will spring to their defence and blame a "personality clash" or (shock, horror!) accuse me of "sarcasm". I once dared to raise my voice to a year 9 student (who was outside throwing stones at teachers' cars when he should have been in a lesson) and was accused of "verbal abuse". Roll on retirement.

DISILLUSIONED OLD FART

As a retired head of mathematics I recognized all the characters and most of the incidents in the diary. I also question the Head of Department the wretched diarist has to put up with. Why does the poor sap have no classes with the upper half of the ability range? And why, when he covers for his boss, is it a top set?

R. WHITING



I've taught in many schools but rarely encountered maths teachers as incapable of controlling and motivating pupils as your diarist.

I don't think publishing this diary will do anything to improve recruitment to the teaching profession. Maths teachers are already in extremely short supply and this diary will simply make the situation worse.

MAGGIE CAINEN

...If A. Teacher's lessons — planned as they were — were as depressing and dull as they read, I didn't wonder he had trouble with difficult pupils. He was lucky to get away uninjured.

IAN BLAKE

Why oh why oh why did Lord Gnome allow the editorial decision to publish *The Secret Diary of a School Teacher*? If I want to read this kind of stuff about educashun I can cancel my subscription and buy the *Daily Mail* instead.

A.N. OTHER TEACHER

...Let's face facts. You only have to stand at a suburban railway station to see that many teenage children are nasty, feral, oafish, hooded sociopaths who end up like that because no one in the home or at school taught them any better. I can remember how ancient teachers at my Belfast grammar school rewarded persistent misbehaviour: they would whack heads with a metal ruler, freeze one's blood with a low growl, or throw blackboard rubbers. It's a pity that your diary-keeping teacher hasn't learned the simple lesson that Man is corrupted by Original Sin, but can be induced to behave himself with clouts from authority.

GRAEME JARDIN

I am 54 years old, childless, and have never been a teacher, but I remember being a pupil some 40 years ago. Being shouted at and hit by the teachers kept us in line to some extent, apart from the official canings. It just seemed some sort of continuation of the treatment I was getting from my father at home, and if there was not enough institutionalized bullying there was compulsory rugby and cadets on top for a skinny, sickly child. Character building? It certainly turned me into a cringing nervous wreck.

MARTYN LUPTON

The Secret Diary was one of the funniest things I've read in Private Eye. For the behaviour of today's school children, and of too many adults under the age of 50, can be attributed in large part to the left-liberal hogwash that's been contaminating western society since the 60s. And who were so prominent in this revolution of attitudes? Why, our jumper-wearing, "call me Kevin, kids" teachers. Seriously arguing that competitive games and examinations were inherently evil, while fascism was a bedfellow of correct spelling and punctuation.

ROYSTON JONES

Seems like not much has changed in the 20 years since I attended secondary school: lessons and manner of delivery continue to be just as boring and seemingly pointless as ever.

It's not surprising that well cared and provided for kids perform better at school. The world is then at least giving them something in reward for jumping through the hoops. It's about time teachers started demanding better equipment and facilities for pupils instead of focusing on them as the problem. Britain's schools need an emergency update. A computer on every desk would solve lack of pens etc. Always quick to strike for a pay rise, I've yet to see the NUT calling for a strike over utilities.

MS D. MAHMOUDIEH

The tragic and depressing picture portrayed by A. Teacher might be relieved if educationalists accepted that Arithmetic and Maths are two completely separate subjects. The former is an essential in all our lives and is, quite correctly, demanded by most employers. The latter is relevant to only a small proportion of the population. A. Teacher would do better to ensure his pupils were well competent in arithmetic and spend the rest of the time teaching plumbing skills or pot plant cultivation.

EDWIN SMITH

Good holidays though.

JIM NORTH

Letter from **Saudi Arabia**

from Our Own Correspondent

ALL is not well in our magic kingdom: the rise of Islamic militancy has transformed our capital Riyadh into a battle zone, where embassies and expat compounds are now guarded by tanks, sandbags and mounted machine guns.

Even so, the suicide bombers who killed more than 50 people in attacks last year, are back. Last week's attack left four dead and more than 100 injured in the city centre. Once elegant Jeddah is falling apart. Eastern Province is where we get all of our oil – $90 *billion* in 2003 – and a lot of our problems too.

Though they will never admit it, our esteemed rulers, the octogenarian sons of Abdulaziz, are beginning to panic. In the past they would make problems disappear by chucking money at them at and hoping they wouldn't resurface. But the Al-Sauds know they can't play this game with the terrorists, who are armed to the teeth, well financed and determined to cause maximum havoc in the land of the two holy mosques.

Our police and armed forces are engaged in a virtual civil war with the terrorists and have killed several of them, as well as suffering their own casualties, in bloody shoot-outs. Their menacing mug-shots appear in our daily papers, offering substantial rewards; but like a Hydra the terrorists appear to multiply before disappearing out of sight.

It is not just us Saudis who are worried. American, British and other expats who were accustomed to a quiet, pampered life here are now either getting out or living under Colditz-like protection. At your average expat compound, you have to pass through at least two checkpoints to get from the gate to the front door – and you still don't feel secure. We can only imagine the security system being devised for the new $1bn-plus pad being built for King Fahd's youngest son, Prince Abdulaziz, which will have a life-sized Alhambra, zoo and the obligatory marble and chandeliers. In these uncertain times, some things, happily, never change.

If the terrorist threat has changed one thing above all, it's our rulers' attitude towards foreign intelligence services meddling in their affairs. We are now cooperating fully with the CIA, MI6 and other services previously kept at arm's length. The FBI is working side-by-side with our folks trying to track down dodgy funds, which would have been unthinkable before 9/11. The British and Americans, however, can do nothing to stop their civilians leaving the kingdom or sending their families to the sanctuary of Dubai.

But let's not be too gloomy. With the amount of money we have, we still have the potential to become a rich and relatively dynamic country. For this to happen, though, we need a change at the top – and fast. The four leading Al-Sauds are, frankly, hopeless geriatrics and need to be replaced by a younger, more forward-looking generation.

Our King Fahd is a near-zombie and known as the "Strokebuster" for his habit of surviving life-threatening brain spasms. His number two, Crown Prince Abdullah, is more on the ball; but Sauds numbers three and four, Sultan and Nayef, seem determined to thwart him. Greater potential rests with the younger number Number Five, Prince Salman, though he's no reforming Gorbachev. Throw in the *Wahabi* clerics, who still employ the stick-wielding *Mutawwas* to keep law and order, and you get the perfect recipe for paralysis.

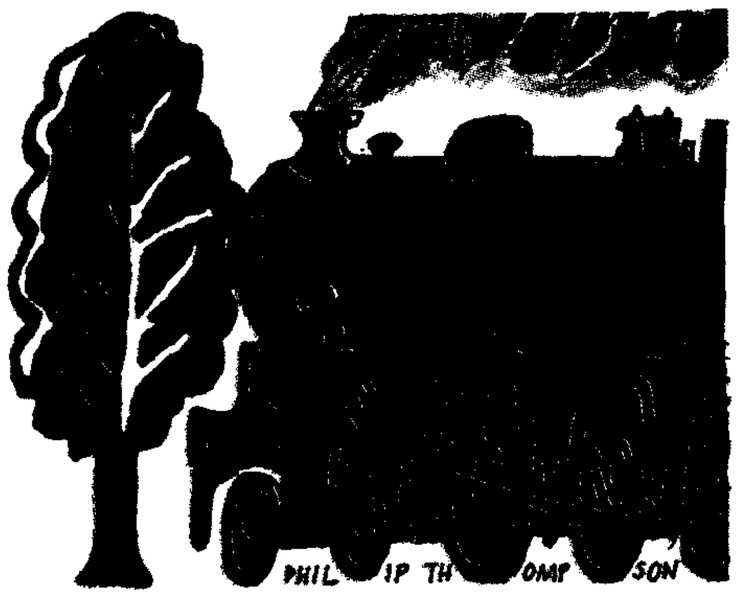
Despite the new cooperation with the west and hints at reform, there's scant evidence of change on the ground. And when the clerics are more concerned about banning women from carrying certain styles of mobile phone or changing the Starbucks logo for being un-Islamic, a sense of despair creeps in.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

o "If people want to commit suicide, they should use trees, not our trains" Tebelelo Seretse told the Botswanan Parliament in Gaborone. "There are plenty of trees in this country, and if someone wants to kill himself, who are we to stop them? But I am sick and tired of these people who throw themselves in front of our trains. It shows no consideration for others, it traumatises the drivers, and more often than not, it damages the wheels."

Seretse (Botswana's Minister of Works and Transport) was commenting on the rapidly growing number of suicides in the country that involve public transport. "People who commit



suicide are often selfish, and seldom think about the inconvenience they cause to others. Every time some moron throws himself under a train or a bus, there are delays, forms to fill out, the bin men are called out and have to be paid overtime, and the drivers often need trauma counselling afterwards. Drivers are ordinary people, why turn them into murderers? Furthermore, these deaths can be very expensive. A couple of years ago, a pilot with Air Botswana decided to kill himself by crashing his plane at Sir Seretse Khama Airport, and he destroyed three-quarters of the aircraft fleet in the process. So if anyone suspects that someone they know is thinking about killing himself by throwing himself under a train or a bus, or crashing a plane, tell them to use a tree instead. And if they refuse, call us, or call the police, and we will teach them a lesson." *(The Voice [Botswana], 19/2/04. Spotter: Emang Bokhutlo)*

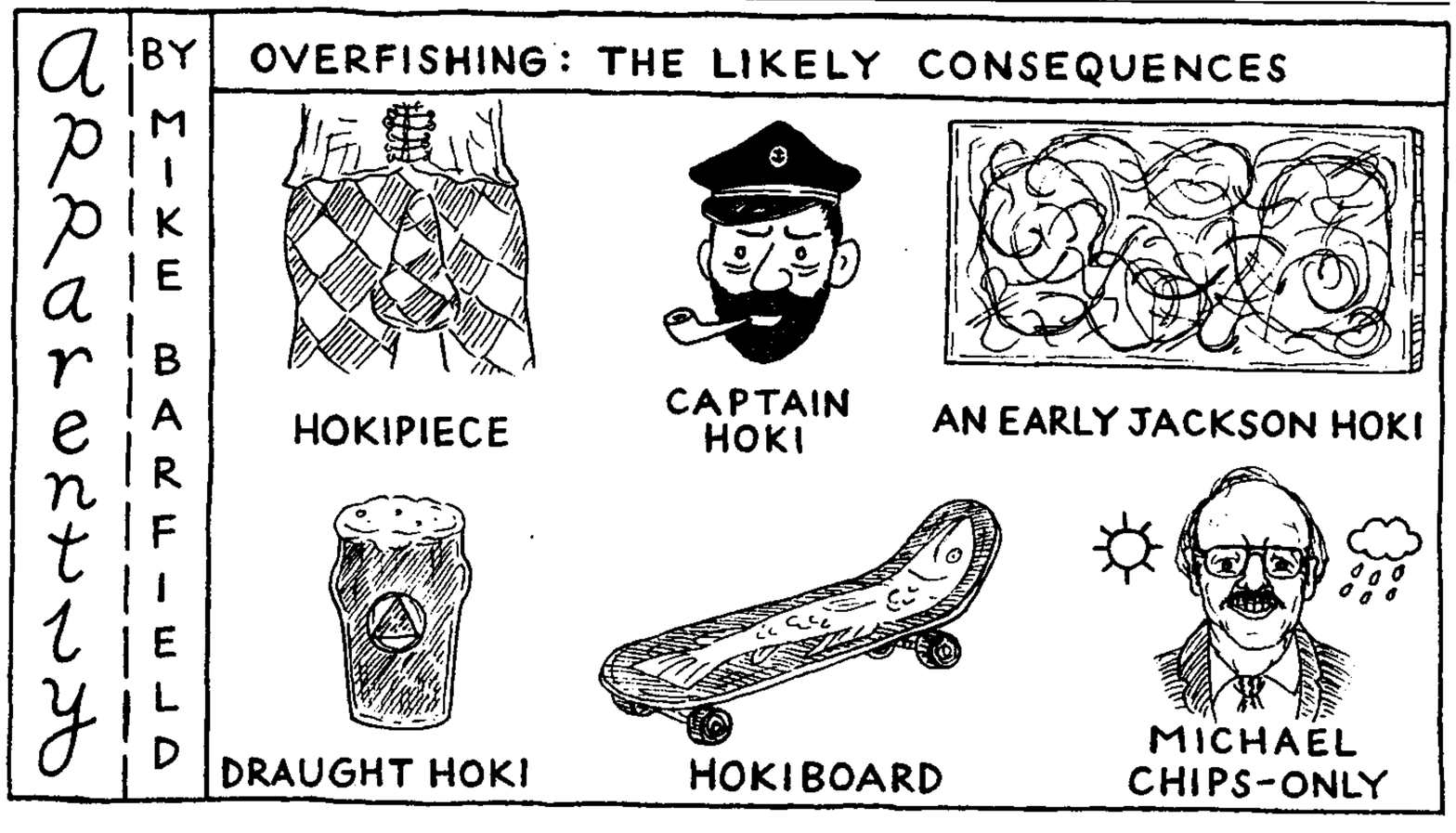
o *"When they brought my aunt's casket through the doors, that's when the cheering and clapping and yelling started," Judy Anthony told reporters outside a funeral home in Quebec. "And as the cars full of mourners drove through, this horrible gauntlet of about fifty strikers kept waving and shouting and clapping and cheering. There were big smiles on their faces, and they were waving banners, and laughing and pointing. It felt as though we were attending a soccer match in Europe, not a funeral. It was hard on all of us, but especially on my uncle, who had just lost his wife of fifty years. But they just didn't seem to care."*

Many mourners have expressed shock and distress over the unruly and disrespectful behaviour of some three hundred workers, during a lengthy strike over pay and conditions at Quebec's largest funeral home, the Urgel Bourgie. "It's very sad, but the strikers aren't doing anything illegal," Montreal police spokesman Miguel Alston told journalists. "They can stand at the gates, jeering and booing as the coffins and mourners go by, but we can only arrest them if there's violence. The same thing happened at the funeral of a police officer's mother recently, but there was nothing we could do." (Le Devoir [Quebec], 27/2/04. Spotter: Darren Ingram)

– **o** –

o "I began driving backwards two years ago," Harpreet Devi told reporters in Islamabad, "when I found I could only get my taxi into reverse gear. After a while, I realised I could drive just as fast backwards as I could forwards, and then I thought to myself, why don't I develop a reverse philosophy in life, and show the world that you can improve a situation by going backwards?"

Devi was explaining why he had reversed his taxi several hundred miles from his native Punjab into Pakistan, ahead of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) conference. "My idea is to take international relations between our two countries back to the peace and mutual tolerance we had long ago, before independence. It's part of my reverse philosophy of life, and my taxi embodies that philosophy. I've modified the forward gears, so now they work in reverse. I can drive backwards at speeds of up to 100kph, and I added headlights to the back of the car, so I can drive at night. True, it's dangerous, and my passengers are sometimes nervous, but I am confident, and have had only one serious accident in the past two years of reverse driving. Of course, driving backwards is awkward. I have got a severe backbone problem from contorting my body, I get frequent pains in the neck, and I have had severe vomiting in the past. But to achieve anything in life you have to suffer, so it is right that I should be experiencing pain, as part of my mission to promote peace between India and Pakistan." *(The Tribune [India], 1/1/04. Spotter: Richard Hewitt)*



LE PORN FLIES IN
– Angry Scenes At Racist Rally

by Our Political Correspondent **Hitler Hastings**

ONE OF Europe's most outrageous right-wingers, Jean Desmond Le Porn, flew into Canary Wharf today amid tight security to deliver an astonishing tirade of racist abuse against a number of shocked Telegraph executives.

Speaking in broken English, Le Porn claimed that the Telegraph was full of 'F***ing' Nazi-lovers and 'sh*tty' Hitler clones who wanted the Germans to take over the world.

Le Porn proceeded to goosestep around the office in the manner of Basil Fawlty, shouting "Don't mention the circulation war".

Deedes Day

He then told his burly henchmen to sing the nationalist anthem *'Desmond Über Alles'*.

One of them, a trembling Heinrich Haslum, obliged in a warbling falsetto.

But this was still not enough for Le Porn who pulled out a Luger pistol and threatened to kill Jeremy "Jerry" Deedes and his venerable father Wilhelm von Deedes on the spot.

Le Porn

Asked about Le Porn's presence in Britain, the Home Secretary David Blunkett said, "We cannot stop Le Porn spreading his message of hate because he gave us £100,000 and is a friend of Tony Blair."

Would you like to have been at the meeting with Monsieur Le Porn? If so, you can read a full transcript of it on www.meinfilth@conservative.uk

"...and just why kids today are obsessed with sex is beyond me"

What You Will Read

Europe – The Choice Is Ours

Mr Blair's decision... historic importance... heart of Europe... little Englanders... left behind on sidelines... going forward... loss of sovereignty... straight bananas... traditional ambivalence... Atlantic ties... constitutional red lines... time to make a choice... yes... no... zzzzzz.

© *All newspapers.*

Yes, it's back! BLUNKETY BLUNK With Your Host David Blunkett!

● Can you fill in the missing Blunk?

"We need I.D. cards because _____ "

(Real answer: I don't know!)

NEW DEFINITIONS With 'Wordsmith'

Referendum	'Yes' vote
Love romp	GBH
Softly, softly approach	Let them get on with it
Cash in	Present my side of the story
Celibate	Homosexual
Pension	Nothing

(To be continued)

MAIL EXCLUSIVE

So what really happened between TV's Lesley Ash and Lee Chapman?

a) We don't know.

b) We're not even sure about that.

© Daily Mail

RUSHDIE MARRIAGE

News In Brief

RAT TO LEAVE SINKING SHIP

MR JOE Rat, a senior figure in rat circles, has announced that he is leaving the SS Labour, on the grounds that there is water coming in.

"It is not the ship that I joined under Captain Wilson," said Joe, "nor is it like the old days under my friend Captain Bob who also left the ship and came to a sticky end."

KETTLE CALLS ON POT TO RESIGN

MR NEIL Kettle, 62, today suggested that it was time for Tony Pot to resign as leader of the country's kitchenware.

"The Pot has lost his touch," said the Kettle from his office in Brussels, "and is completely burned out. In fact, he is totally and utterly black. I should go now."

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo!

And it seems that some people in the parish have had nothing better to do than to complain that I have done what they call a "u-turn".

And what's wrong with that, I ask? Doesn't every sensible driver have to perform a u-turn occasionally, as conditions change?

If we see that we are coming up to roadworks, or that there is a pile-up on the road ahead, or that, heaven forbid, the road is leading straight over a cliff – then, hey, it would be quite wrong *not* to do a u-turn!

Not that in this case we were heading for a cliff! Don't get me wrong!

"But, Vicar," I hear some of the awkward squad saying in the pews at the back of the church, "didn't you make a point of saying, at the parish outing last year, that you didn't have a reverse gear?"

Firstly, can I say how sad it is that some of you have got nothing better to do than to dig around in old copies of the newsletter for things I said in the past, that they can then use to trip me up?

Honestly!

Secondly, can I just point out that, in order to do a u-turn, you do NOT NEED TO USE A REVERSE GEAR!

The whole point of doing a u-turn is that you continue to move forwards, not backwards, throughout the manoeuvre!

And that's precisely what I'm doing – continuing to move forward on the great motorway of life!

Was it not the Blessed Margaret herself who said, "You turn if you like, but I'm not going to"?

And if it was good enough for my great predecessor, the Deaconess Thatcher, then it's certainly good enough for me!

So that's why I am asking you all to move forward with me, in the opposite direction to which we were going, so that everyone in the parish can have the chance to give their views on this vital question of this parish's future role in the wider oecumenical European context that we all support!

When I was recently on a well-earned break in Bermuda (after my hugely successful half-hour visit to the Rev. Dubya at his Washington tabernacle), I decided that it was only right that you should all have the opportunity to support me in my plans to move ahead.

I knew that I could count on the full backing of the PCC, once they read about it in the local paper.

All it will involve is answering a simple "Yes" or "No" questionnaire, as below:

☐ YES, the Vicar is doing a marvellous job and we should all give him 100 percent support

☐ NO, I am an idiot and my views should be discounted

So, let the "ballot" commence!

Yours, in anticipation of victory!

Tony

Commander-in-Chief of "Operation Yes"!!!!

The vicar's wife and Rev Dubya's wife join together in a chorus of the old American classic (!!!!!) at an informal karaoke service during the vicar's trip to Washington. *D.H.*

A Letter from the Rev. Dubya

Greetings to the Rev. Tiny Bloom

It was a privilege and an honority to welcome you and your good lady Chardonnay once again to my humble ranch, to chew over the next moves in our battle to rid the world of all these pesky new Satans who seem to have sprung up since we got rid of the old Great Satan who we found in that hole in the ground!

You Tiny, are the one 'stand-up guy' who has backed me through thick and thin while every other coyote and rattlesnake has run off with his tail between his legs, like this new hombre from Spainland, Senor Yellowbolero or whatever he calls himself. But I tell you, he won't get away with it, no sir! There's no sombrero big enough for him to hide under!

But Tiny, you and I ride on together, to finish the job that we started! They'll try to ambush us at the creek, sure they will! They'll try to head us off at the pass, sure they will! They'll shoot us in the ass, even if we're dead, sure they will! But do we give a damn, no sirree!

Yours in the Lord!
Rev. Dubya

Parish Postbag

From: Mr D. Desmond, ex-friend of the Vicar

Dear Sir,

Having supported the Vicar for quite a while now and having forked out very generously for the Vicar's "Gift Aid Scheme", I now wish to make clear that "enough is enough". And you know what I mean, Tony, because I told you when you had me round to the vicarage for tea with your wife and that sexy friend of hers, Carole, blimey, she'd look a bit of alright in one of my mags, perhaps I should start a new one specially for her, Holistic Babes, no offence Your Reverence, anyway, I digress, when I say "enough is enough", I'm talking about all them immigrants flooding into the parish and taking the jobs of decent, honest, hardworking purveyors of top-shelf adult entertainment, such as Asian

Yours faithfully,
D. Desmond
Proprietor, Dirty Des's Mags 'n' Fags Emporium (above the chip shop), Filth Street.

The Editor regrets that some letters may have to be cut to avoid their authors being allowed to advertise their pornographic magazines in this family newsletter. *D.H*

"Once you buggers spot a profitable business you can't resist trying to corner the market, can you?"

School news

St Cakes

Hadj Term begins today. There are 798 boys and no girls in the school on the instructions of the new Imam *(see below)*. M. Hussain (Fatwa's) is Keeper of the Fertiliser. N.J.Q. Burkas-Peerage (Mecca's) is succeeded by P.F. Halal-Butcher (Hamas's). The Rev. P.J. Gropetrouser, our former Chaplain, has been replaced by Mohammed Al-Sadr as the School Imam. The Classics Department has been closed down and replaced by Koranic Studies (nine periods a day) to be led in the School Mosque (formerly St Cake's Chapel) by the Ayatollah Rasfanjani from Iran. The Camel Race will be run on the Field of the Prophet (formerly St George's Meadow) on 1 May 1572. There will be a performance of the musical *Saladin Days*, directed by Ned El-Sherrin O.C., on 16 June 1572. Speech Day is on 8 July 1572, main speaker: HRH Prince Charles on "Our Debt To Islam" (£200 billion). Executions will be on 12 July. Tickets from the Bursar, Col. Fotherington-Gaddafi, O.C., c/o The Old Tent, Sandy Lane, New Riyadh, Solihull.

GOVERNMENT PLAN ONLINE EXAMS

Government education sources have confirmed that GCSE and A-Levels will in the future be taken onscreen at a computer.

Below is how our education staff envisage a typical online exam paper:

1. Log on
2. Surf for porn
3. Enter chatroom
4. Download latest 'Busted' single
5. Look up all answers on Google
6. Log off

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Morris McWhirter, founder of *The Guinness Book Of Records*

So. Farewell
Then Norris
McWhirter,
Founder of *The*
Guinness Book of
Records.

Your book sold
So well it
Got into
Itself.

But sadly, at 78,
You personally did
Not set any
Records in
The "World's Oldest
Man" section.

E.J. Thribb (17½),
the world's second-youngest
published free-verse poet
(not including China)

NURSERY SEX EDUCATION RHYME

Bobby Shaftoe's gone to
sea,
When he comes back he'll
have VD,
Like as not he'll give it to
me,
Bonny Bobby Shaftoe.

ARCHBISHOP SLAMS BLAIR OVER IRAQ

by Our Chief War Correspondent **Lunchtime O'Basra**

BRITAIN's top Primate, the Rt. Rev. Rowan Beardie, last night launched an astonishing personal attack on the Prime Minister, Tony Blair, over his handling of the Iraqi war.

The Archbishop's outspoken comments provoked a storm of protest and outrage in Westminster, as MPs rallied to support their beleaguered leader as he wilted under the savage assault delivered from the pulpit of Canterbury Cathedral earlier in the day.

Exit Pursued By A Beard

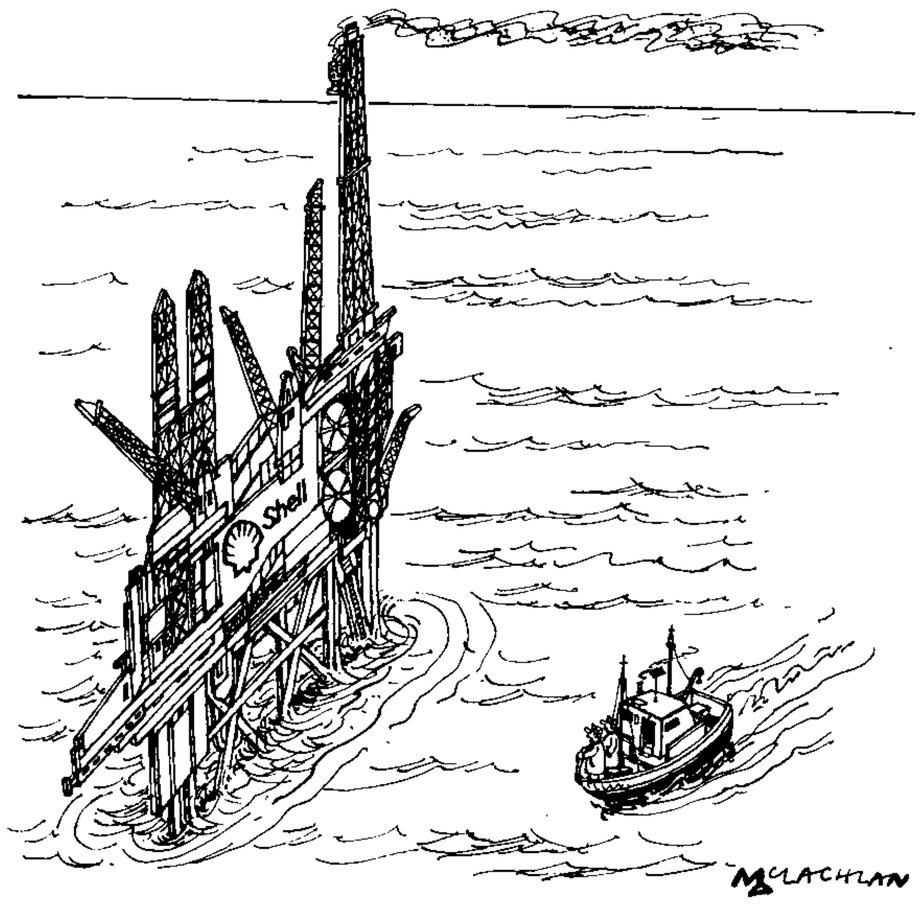
Leading churchmen also expressed disquiet over the Archbishop's controversial intervention in the political arena – many of them expressing fears that he had "gone too far" in his blunt denunciation of Britain's elected head of government.

As the furore showed no signs of abating, informed observers were last night predicting that one of the two men would have to resign.

That Astonishing Beardie Sermon In Full

"In a modern environment, the old paradigm of trust in a political context has been deconstructed in such a way as to obfuscate and blur over our understanding of – and our obedience to – the imperatives, both human and non-human, which create the moral dynamic which is an essential underpinning of any attempt to create that genuine structure of acceptance which St. Augustine of Hippo rightly regarded, in my view, as the basis for what he called 'katagnorosis'. And now, Hymn 94."

● How shocked were you by the Archbishop of Canterbury's attack on the Prime Minister's Iraq policy? If you want to join the great 'Beardie v. Blair' debate, you can contact us through www.blairbeardrow.co.uk



"I wonder if the Shell shareholders know about this as well..."

Radio 4

What You Missed

Jim Naughtie *(for it is he)*: These pictures of Diana, Princess of Wales, in her dying agony, which have been shown on American television – I mean, would you say that they were disgusting, tasteless, repugnant and offensive, and should never have been broadcast?

Royal Expert: Well, we have seen these pictures before, and they were very indistinct, and they were only on the screen for a few seconds...

Naughtie: So what you're saying is that a lot of people would have been really outraged by this intrusion into private grief? I mean, what if the Princes were to see these pictures of their mother dying? Isn't that stepping way beyond the bounds of any normal standards of decency?

Royal Expert: Well, you know, I wouldn't personally...

Naughtie: ... just how long is this media obsession with the late Princess Diana going to last? Are we going to have an endless succession of programmes picking over every detail of her death in a rather ghoulish way? Are we ever going to talk about anything else?

Royal Expert: It seems not.

Naughtie: Well, that's all we've got time for. But after the news we'll be going over live to America, to talk to some of the people who watched those horrific and shocking pictures, and they'll be telling us just how offensive and disgusting they found them, and hopefully filling in a few details about blood and so on. And now, *Thought For The Day*, with Abu Hamza, the Chief Imam of the Finsbury Park Mosque.

Hamza: You know, in a very real sense, we should kill all the Jews, and then blow up everyone in the West for *(Cont. 94 kHz)*

TV FILMS

Bush Cassidy And The Sunsays Kid

EPIC western in which two mismatched outlaws wisecrack their way through a series of disasters before coming to a sticky end.

If you would like to see the above film or just join the great film debate, simply log on to www.dubya.con

Daily Mail
FRIDAY, APRIL 30, 2004

TAP WATER – NEW SHOCK FEARS

by Our Entire Staff **Clare Monger and Peter Panic**

SCIENTISTS have found a new link between ordinary tap water and a fall in house prices.

Says one leading expert, "We believe drinking tap water may well be connected to a slump in the property market."

He continued "We don't, at this moment in time, know exactly what the connection is. We only know that the Daily Mail has asked us to look into it."

© Mail Trash

How do I know I'm having a mid-life crisis?

by **Daily Thomas** of the David Mail

YOU'RE a miserable middle-aged man and you can't hide it any longer. And how do you know? Is it the Harley Davidson on the driveway outside? Is it the fact that your trousers don't fit? Or that your fine head of hair has mysteriously gone down the plughole?

No. It's because you find yourself writing this guff in the Daily Mail and trying to spin it out for *(That's enough, Ed.)*

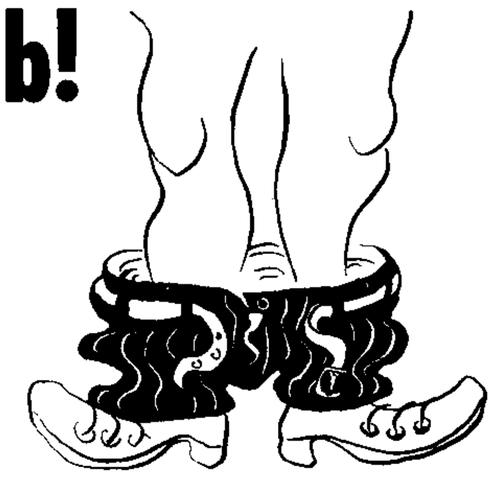
TOMORROW in the Daily Mail: Why I love vegetables by Max Hastings *(Because they will buy any old rubbish to fill space.)*

First Night Theatre Review

Run For Your Job!

HILARIOUS FARCE about a hapless Daily Mail theatre critic (Michael Coveney) who is sacked by his ruthless editor (Paul Dacre) who has fallen in love with the Daily Telegraph's critic (Charles Spencer). Paul wants to give Charles Michael's job! Charles seems keen at first but trouble starts when he gives Paul the brush off and decides to stay at the Daily Telegraph instead.

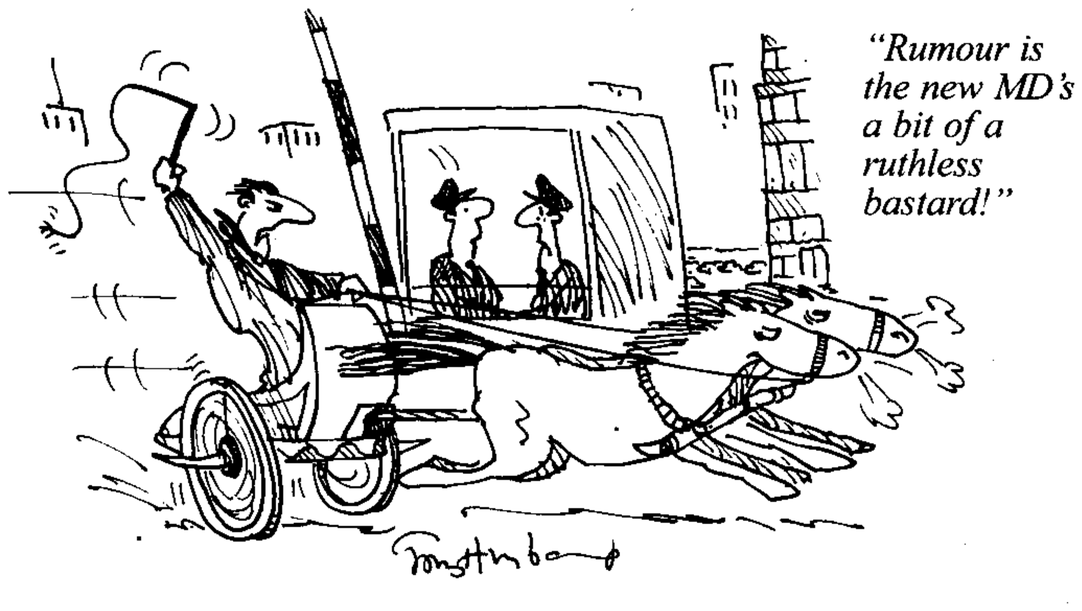
Too late! Paul has already dumped Michael and is left with his trousers down and egg on his face!



GARRY

"I laughed all the way to the bank" – *Charles Spencer, The Daily Telegraph*

"You *** ** **** ****!"** – *Michael Coveney, ex-Daily Mail*



"Rumour is the new MD's a bit of a ruthless bastard!"

THE SUN, Friday 30, 2004

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL PAPERS

WOMAN CRIES AT DAUGHTER'S FUNERAL

by Our Entire Staff

A WOMAN was today photographed in tears at the funeral of her daughter. *(Reuters)*

- Close-up pix of the woman crying **1, 2, 5, 7, 10**
- The private grief of the woman crying in the pictures **11, 12, 13, 17**
- How on earth will grief-stricken Gloria *(contd. p. 94)*

SHE'S ON THE LOOS!

by **Phil Space**

THE SLEAZY señorita is at it again! And there seems to be no end to her publicity-seeking antics.

Here she is spotted on page 5 of our newspaper. Has she got no shame? You would think she would stay at home rather than brazenly appear in our pages, but oh no – the desperate wannabe has deliberately had a piece written about her by myself! And for why? Because I'm more pathetic than she is.

Yet another photo of the Loos woman!

© *All newspapers.*

EU POLL SENSATION

100% Of Sun Proprietors Say 'NO'

A MASSIVE 100 percent of News International chiefs called Rupert have said NO to Tony Blair's EU dream.

A total of one Australian media magnate in our 'I The Jury' survey voted against handing more power over to Brussels – an overwhelming blow to the Prime Minister's future plans for Europe.

ADVERTISEMENT

DEAR Esther

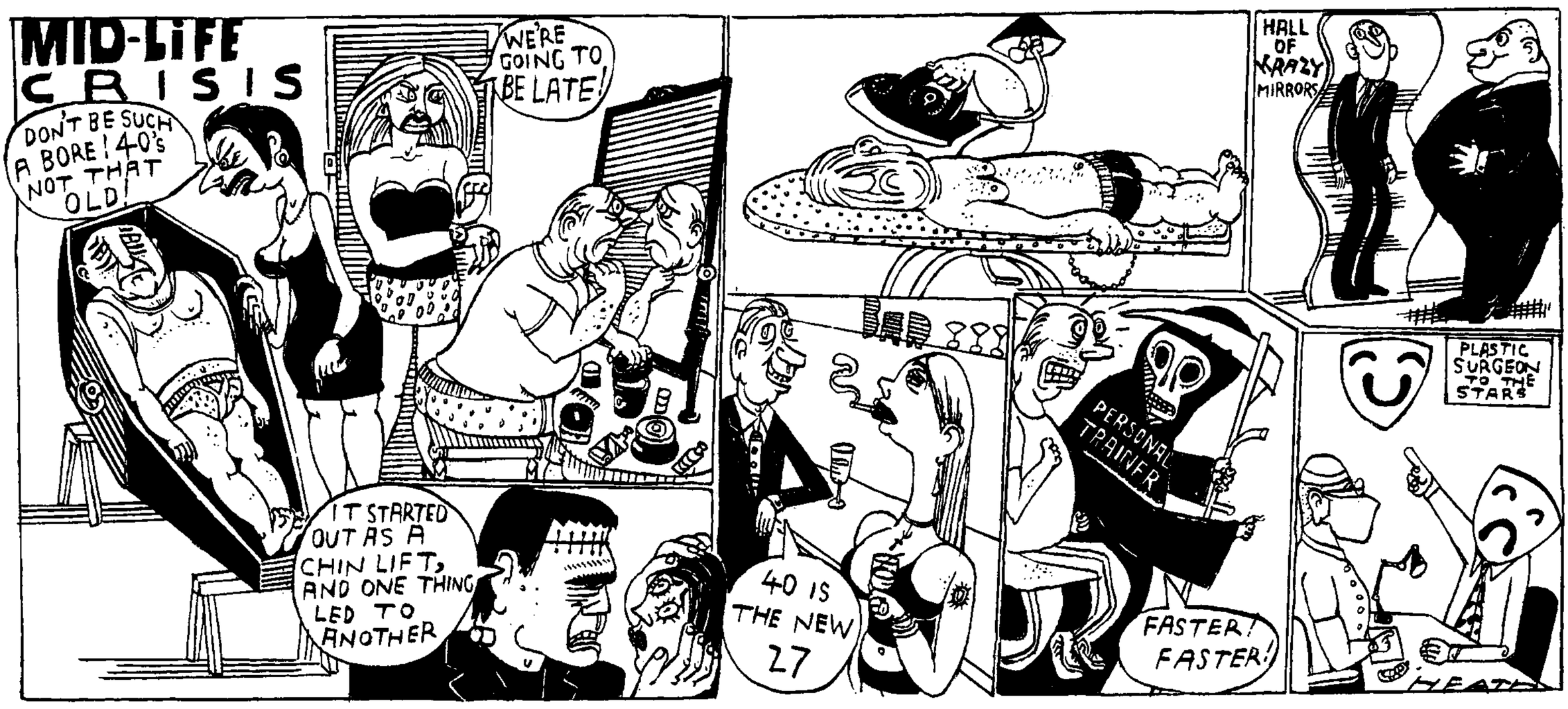
SHOULD I CLAIM FOR MY ACCIDENT?

I WAS watching television last Sunday when I accidentally turned over to the BAFTA Award ceremony. There on the screen was this awful old woman with a toothy smile wearing a frightful red halter-neck dress. It was a very painful experience for me and I still feel ill when I think about it. Am I entitled to compensation?

■ **ESTHER SAYS:** How dare you try and screw money out of people with some bogus claim, you pathetic ambulance chaser! I've a good mind to sue you for the hurt you've caused me. In fact I'm going to ring myself up immediately and get some lawyers onto it. I would advise anyone else to do the same!

Thank you!
Says E.R. of London "All I did was pick up the phone, agreed to do the advert, and in no time at all a huge cheque arrived in the post."

If you fancy some easy money why not try endorsing Injury Claim Helplines?


MID-LIFE CRISIS
DON'T BE SUCH A BORE! 40's NOT THAT OLD!
WE'RE GOING TO BE LATE!
IT STARTED OUT AS A CHIN LIFT, AND ONE THING LED TO ANOTHER
40 IS THE NEW 27
HALL OF KRAZY MIRRORS
PERSONAL TRAINER
FASTER! FASTER!
PLASTIC SURGEON TO THE STARS

400 YEARS OF BBC2

WHAT YOU MISSED IF YOU CAME IN HALFWAY THROUGH

Voiceover: ... and then of course there was the most epoch-making of all BBC2's epoch-making dramas, *Our Boys In The Northstuff*, by Alan Blackdale

(Shot of unemployed actors playing dominoes in North Country pub)

First Actor: 'appen I've got job wi' BBC2.

Second Actor: Jammy booger.

First Actor: It's t'roobish, but it pays t'rent.

Second Actor: I blame Thatcher.

Third Actor: Fooking bitch.

(Cut to lugubrious man in polo-neck sweater)

Alan Blackbeard *(for it is he)*: When I first submitted the script to the Controller of BBC2, he said "Alan, it just won't do. It's too brave, too brilliant, too powerful. I can't possibly show it."

(Cut to man in leather jacket, formerly Controller of BBC2)

Alain de Botney *(for it is he)*: When I first saw the script of 'Northstuff', I knew at once I had to have it. It was so brave, so briliant, so powerful.

Voiceover: And the rest of course was TV history. But no year could match 1982, the year when the legendary *Toast Programme* marked an epoch-making watershed in BBC2's documentary output.

(Cut to balding, middle-aged man in polo-neck sweater. Caption: 'Michael Hovis, presenter of The Toast Programme 1982-1994')

Hovis *(for it is he)*: It seems incredible now that, in those days, and I'm talking about the early '80s, no one had ever thought of making a programme devoted to toast. Particularly when you think that toast plays such an important part in all our lives, on a daily basis.

(Cut to blonde woman standing in kitchen with a younger Hovis, holding up a piece of toast. Caption: 'Sandra Sunblest, co-presenter The Toast Programme, 1982-1998')

Sunblest *(for it is she)*: Go on, Mike, try it!

Hovis: M-m-m-m, that's surprisingly good!

Sunblest: And you'll like it even more when I put some of this Marmite on it!

Hovis: Marmite? You must be joking, Sandra! This is what young people are eating today – fishpaste!

Voiceover: And talking of young people, it wasn't long before BBC2 discovered the need for an epoch-making show catering specifically for the long-overlooked teenage audience.

(Cut to tall woman with green hair and protruding teeth)

Janet Street-Yentob *(for it is she)*: All you could see on telly in those days was old people doing old people's things, like making toast, and it was so b-o-o-ring!

(Cut to gyrating group of young persons wearing silver foil miniskirts filmed at crazy camera angles, with text running over the top reading 'Coming up soon – more captions you can't read'. Cut to middle-aged black man in lurex jump suit. Caption: 'Rimsky Normaskoff, presenter of Rubbish!!! 1984-1985')

Normaskoff *(for it is he)*: Basically, it was really epoch-making to get young people on screen doing things for themselves, and not just sitting around making toast. *Rubbish!!!* was the show that stretched the envelope. It was BBC2 at its bravest, its most brilliant, its most powerful.

Voiceover: And talking of epoch-making television, who can ever forget the late-night arts programme which re-defined the whole nature of late-night arts programmes. In the words of its first producer, *The Late Nights Arts Programme* was "as brave, as brilliant and as powerful as it was epoch-making".

(Cut to old footage of woman with frizzy hair and red-rimmed glasses)

Sarah Doonatwatch *(for it is she)*: Tonight on *The Late Night Arts Programme* we've got the German artist, Hans Pumpernickel, who makes sculptures out of toast. Then we shall be looking at Episode 734 of *Our Boys Up The Northstuff*, the searing new BBC drama, and a new book about Britain's youth culture by Rimsky Normaskoff. But first our guest critics.

(We see footage of two men in polo-neck sweaters having a fight)

Voiceover: But if there was one programme which summed up the epoch-making contribution of BBC2 more than any other, it must surely be the most popular programme the channel has ever put out in all of its 40 years, *The Boys From The Pot Black Stuff.*

(Shot of snooker ball disappearing down side pocket)

Bald Man In Bow Tie: Booger.

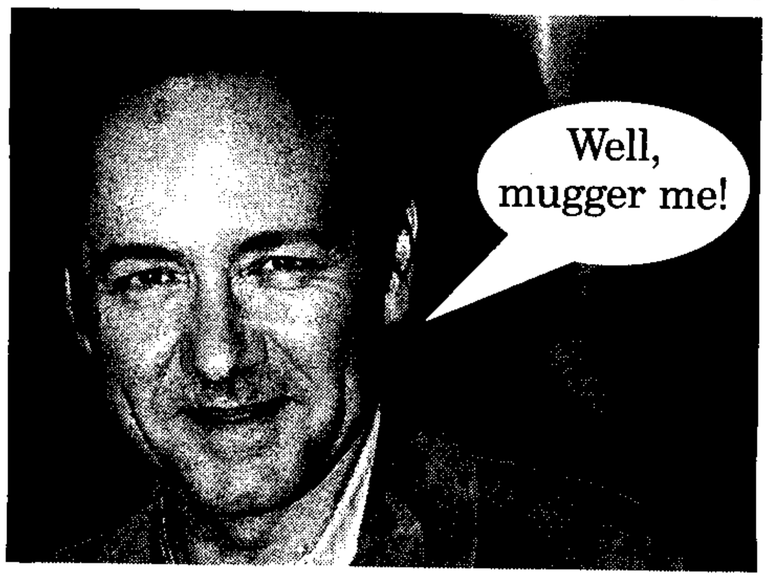
2nd Bald Man In Bow Tie: I blame Thatcher.

Ends

Have you got a favourite memory of BBC2? Join the big BBC2 debate on our website *www.boysfromtheblackslap.co.uk*

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOD
I HATE IT WHEN YOU SEE A PLAYER GOING DOWN...
AND YOU GET ALL THAT PLAY ACTING...
I'M A FAMILY MAN, I LOVES POSH, I'M STILL A ROLE MODEL!
DO YOU WANT ONE OF THEM SNOGGING?
AGENT

KEVIN SPACEY IN EARLY MORNING WALK IN PARK SHOCK



THE VOICE OF THE SEXPRESS

TONY BLAIR has lost the cheque *(Surely "trust"? Ed.)* of the *Daily Sexpress*. The Prime Minister has let us down. As proprietor, I even went to tea with him. But nothing has changed. There is still violent crime on our streets; public services are still in decline; immigration has still not been tackled. And I am still regarded as a seedy figure of fun. We all hoped that it would be different under New Labour. We all hoped that Europe would be sorted out, that taxes would be lowered and that I would become a respectable figure who could bid for the *Daily Telegraph*.

Yet what happened? Iraq is a mess, council tax is rising, public transport is failing and I remain a sleazy pornographer on the make.

That is why the *Sexpress* is switching its alliance to the Tory Party. And so are all my other titles.

Mr Blair, from now on you no longer enjoy the backing of *Asian Babes*, *Grannies on the Job* and *Big Black and Bouncy*. Their editors, like Peter Hill of the *Sexpress*, have all independently decided to do what they are told and support Michael Howard. From now on, it is not New Labour, but the Conservatives who are the party for right-handed wankers *(Surely "right-thinking readers"? Ed.)*.

Sir Dirtswell Desmond,
245 Blackteens Road,
London SE X

Shameful Secrets Of Joker Howard

by Our TV Staff **Nikolai Gogol-Box**

A CHANNEL Four TV series *'Frankly Howard – Behind The Scenes'* has for the first time ripped aside the veil of respectability that has hitherto protected one of Britain's best-loved comedians, Michael 'Frankly' Howard.

Up Pompous

Far from being a jovial knockabout performer who tickled the nation's ribs with his catchphrase "You Can't Trust The Prime Minister", Howard was a compulsive Conservative who was unable to control his Tory urges.

Many friends testify to Howard's attempts to "grab" any voter who came into the room.

Says one close friend, "If he was in a meeting with a group of young men, he would ask them 'Are you one of us?' and then try and make them vote Conservative."

Titter Ye Not

In some cases, his behaviour was completely shameless, continued the friend: "I once saw him offering to take his manifesto out and show it to a group of Old Etonians."

Howard emerges as a sad figure who *(cont. p. 94)*

MY MOMENT OF MADNESS

by **E.I. Erewego**, Our Man With The BNP T-shirt And A Bottle of Dasani

THE SOCCER world was rocked to its foundations yesterday when Ron Knee, the ashen-faced football supremo, used the 'N'-word, 'Neasden', in an off-the-cuff broadcast to Abu Dhabi.

Big Ron, 59, later said, "It was a moment of madness, just like you said in the headline. As anyone will tell you, I have always picked Neasden players for my team, regardless of their ability. But I have paid the price and I have resigned from my job as soccer pundit on Neasden Hospital Radio."

Thick and Lazio

The tight-lipped supremo then told reporters, "I have also been sacked from writing my column 'Big Ron's World' for the *North Circular Guardian*."

But fans were quick to rally round the maestro of the relegation-doomed "Squirrels". Said Sid Bonkers, "No way is Big Ron prejudiced. He tells it like it is. Except when he doesn't. And then it is not his fault. Society is to blame. As you said earlier, it was a moment of madness."

LATE SCORE

The World Of Sofas Charity Vase (2nd leg)

Sporting Lagos 0

F*** C*** Neasden 0

(Game abandoned after 2 minutes, as entire Neasden team arrested for racial abuse)

THE GAZA GUARDIAN **POSITIONS VACANT**

HAMAS LEADER

We are currently looking for an energetic, charismatic chief executive able to face the challenges of leading Hamas into the 21st century.

The successful applicant needs to have good motivational skills, an ability to duck quickly, and should ideally be bulletproof.

There is a bonus scheme for those staying in the job longer than a week.

Please apply in writing to:
Hamas Leader
Box 94, The Gaza Grauniad
Palestine, Israel

"Dad, we've got to move with the times!"

Film Highlights

RON ATKINSON IS MR HAS-BEAN!

The fun starts when Mr Has-Bean opens his mouth!

EYE RATING:
****

TOM DIXON TALKS WITH SIR TERENCE CONRAN

Sir Terence Conran: Before you ask me anything, Tom, there's something I've always wanted to ask you. Tell me, young Tom – as creative director of Habitat, were you hugely influenced by me?

Tom Dixon: Well, not necessarily –

Sir Terence: – you see, I'll never forget the sheer excitement of going to France in the 1950s, when every single person in England was condemned to wear the black bowler hat and walk around on foot, and becoming the first Englishman to discover the beret and the bicycle!

Tom Dixon: That must have been –

Sir Terence: If you'll just let me finish, Tom. So I am immensely proud to have been the very first person to bring the bicycle to Britain. It started with me singlehandedly bicycling along what was then the King's Road, but after less than a year it really caught on, and nowadays, of course, it is commonplace. Nor does anyone wear the bowler hat any more. Though it was a Design Classic in its day, of course.

Tom Dixon: I've often –

Sir Terence: And it's quite extraordinary to think that when I first brought them to Dover, not a soul in this country had seen an onion before. Yet now they are absolutely everywhere. Same with the cushion. I came up with the whole concept of the cushion in the early Sixties. Tremendously exciting times. Until then, everyone had just stayed standing or had sat on exceedingly hard chairs. I still have ordinary decent men and women coming up to me in the street with tears in their eyes and clasping me by the hand and thanking me for the cushion.

Tom Dixon: That's funny, because I remember when I first –

Sir Terence: But there's something I've always wanted to ask you, Tom. Do you think, as so many do, that you owe a vast debt to my whole design concept? I only ask, because before I first invented the whole concept of the roof – or what we then called the Le Roof range – not one single building in the whole of this country had a roof. This meant, of course, that after a spell of rain the goods in all the shops and retail outlets were all tremendously soggy, and the customers would be sniffing and sneezing everywhere because the rain would have been literally pouring onto them in their beds. But I'm immensely proud to say that Le Roof changed all that, which was hugely exciting. And the knife and fork, too –

Tom Dixon: Did you –

Sir Terence: Yes, I invented the knife and fork – Le Knife and Le Fork – back in the marvellous autumn of 1959. Until that time, the typical British dinner party was full of people doing their level best to eat with their hands. This was just about acceptable for a sandwich or even an apple, but as for the stew or the boeuf casserole, well, you can imagine – it was quite simply catastrophic. But that's enough from me about my enormous contribution. As you probably know, I've always been remarkably interested in the young, and what they're thinking. So tell me, Tom – what do you think about my enormous contribution?

Tom Dixon: I've always felt that –

Sir Terence: Of course, in those days, no one had ever even heard of the Chicken Brick. But by June, 1964, the Chicken Brick was quite literally everywhere. There were Chicken Bricks in St Paul's, and all the way along the Strand. The Mall was even decorated with Chicken Bricks for the state visit of the French President. It was a defining moment.

Tom Dixon: By all accounts –

Sir Terence: But one's never been one to sit on one's laurels – and let's never forget that one hadn't even invented laurels back then – so in the September of that year, from my workshop in what was then Bethnal Green, I produced my first range of kitchen furniture. Up until then, no one had ever thought of putting furniture in the kitchen. If you wanted to sit down, you'd have to sit on the floor. The idea took off in an immensely huge way, so by early Spring 1965, I felt confident enough to launch my whole staircase concept onto the market.

Tom Dixon: I've always been –

Sir Terence: People had always had first floors and basements, and so on, but until that moment they'd never been able to get to them. But the staircase revolutionised all that. Yet when we first launched it, retailers came from around the country and said, "Oh, well, the staircase could work in Swinging Chelsea, but it could never happen in Manchester or Birmingham or any one of those dreadfully ordinary little places."

But I remember looking at ordinary working class homes with two or even three floors still completely unused and thinking, those frankly very ordinary people DESERVE to be able to get to those floors they've frankly never set eyes upon. You see, good design actually has the ability to improve the quality of quite ordinary people's lives. It probably sounds a little pompous to say it, but I've always felt that until I opened Habitat in what was then the Fulham Road no one in London had ever smiled before. And it's hugely humbling to think that I brought such happiness to so many millions of people's lives. And – remember, Tom – this was some months before I happened to design the first shower, or Le Shower. Suddenly, all over Britain, people were clean.

Tom Dixon: I –

Sir Terence: But it was only after I designed the Duvet that sex in this country really took off in a big way. Until then, it had been very much a once-a-year act, usually performed in a very dull grey suit and tie, or long dress, under strict medical supervision. But my whole Duvet concept made sex accessible to everyone – and with my Chicken Brick, you could simmer your Sunday roast at the same time in a different part of the bed, which was truly revolutionary.

But that's enough about me, Tom. I do apologise – I fear I've been far too generous with my advice and reminiscences, and it's time you marvellous young designers had your say, for all your obvious faults! So, tell me, Tom, I imagine it must be hugely disappointing having to follow in the footsteps of such a deservedly influential innovator as my own good self?!

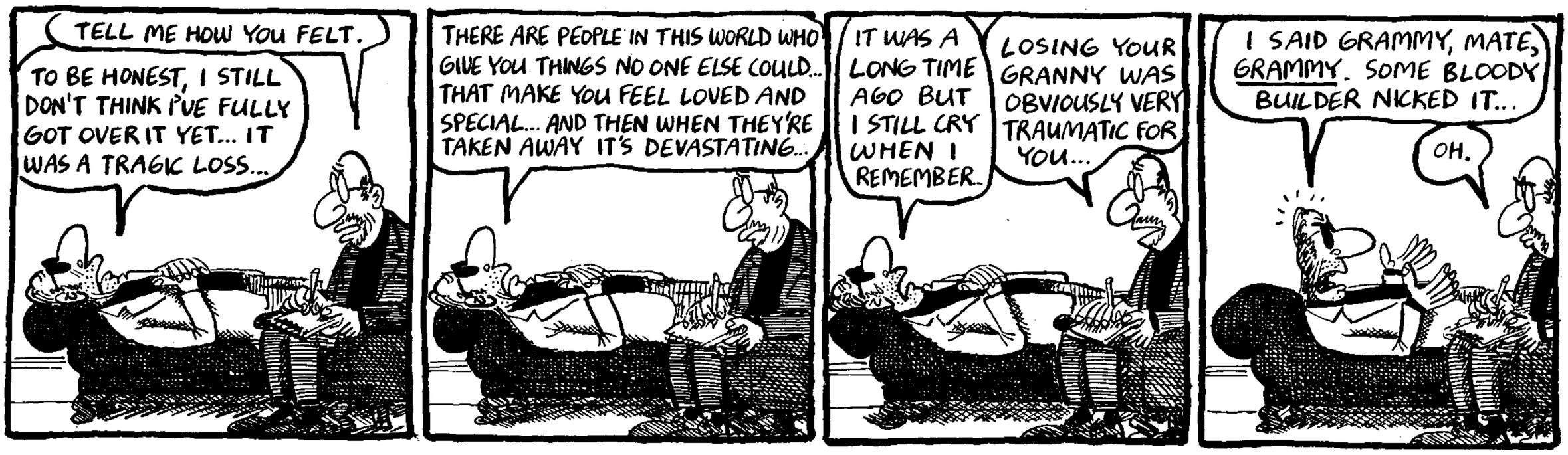
Tom Dixon: Well, in one sense –

Sir Terence: My goodness, is that the time? Must dash!I honestly don't know what we'd all do if I hadn't designed the first wristwatch way back in '66, in what was then South Ken.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER


TELL ME HOW YOU FELT.
TO BE HONEST, I STILL DON'T THINK I'VE FULLY GOT OVER IT YET... IT WAS A TRAGIC LOSS...
THERE ARE PEOPLE IN THIS WORLD WHO GIVE YOU THINGS NO ONE ELSE COULD... THAT MAKE YOU FEEL LOVED AND SPECIAL... AND THEN WHEN THEY'RE TAKEN AWAY IT'S DEVASTATING...
IT WAS A LONG TIME AGO BUT I STILL CRY WHEN I REMEMBER..
LOSING YOUR GRANNY WAS OBVIOUSLY VERY TRAUMATIC FOR YOU...
I SAID GRAMMY, MATE, GRAMMY. SOME BLOODY BUILDER NICKED IT..
OH.

Literary Review

Hob-knobbing

The Line of Beauty
Alan Hollinghurst
(Picador, £16.99)

WHICH professional classes, some phantom A level sociology exam might usefully commence, *did best out of the 1980s*? Well, stockbrokers and accountants, naturally, and property tycoons and defence procurement manufacturers, and even used-car salesmen; but also – to narrow the coign of vantage to a more obscure microcosm – novelists.

Twenty years ago, as publishing restructured and foreign money moved in, a certain kind of English writer – Mart and Julian, Ian and Kaz and the stars of the 1983 *Granta* "Best of Young British" promotion – began to coin it in a way that very few "literary" practitioners ever had before. That barely a handful of them subsequently produced anything of any merit is a nice little artistico-moral parable that we perhaps won't go into here.

As to how these brave boys (and they were mostly boys) reacted to the decade which had set them up for life, well, naturally their fascination with its shiny surfaces was matched only by their loathing of its orchestrator. Barnesey, Mart and the rest hated 80s Conservatism: no literary party of the era was complete without some conscience-stricken scrivener informing the guests that "Mrs Thatcher is evil". Yet the root cause of this disdain, one suspects, lay in sheer snobbery. Mrs T's fatal flaw, oddly enough, was less her monetarism than her lower middle-class vulgarity. All of which leads us to Mr Alan Hollinghurst's exquisite new novel, raved over by every reviewer you care to name, and if one can locate degrees of snobbery, reposing somewhere between the fruitier bits of *Brideshead Revisited* and Brian Sewell's preening art criticism.

The Line of Beauty follows the languid trajectory of camp twentysomething Nick Guest (his surname by no means the novel's only symbolic contrivance), a humble antique dealer's son, lately down from Oxford (First, beginning doctorate on Henry James, etc) and lodging in the west London home of the Feddens, parents of his college chum Toby. Pa Fedden is a rising Tory MP, ma the aquiline sister of supertoff Lord Kessel. A dippy sister named Catherine completes the ménage.

Gay young blade that he is, forever in search of the abstract of the title, whether human or aesthetic, Nick's lovelife is somewhat complex, not to say diffuse. The latter involves, at various points, Leo, a black council worker from Willesden (corking scene when Nick gets invited home to tea) and Lebanese millionaire Wani. Meanwhile the pot of 80s Toryism is boiling acridly away in the background and everyone, clearly, is heading for a fall.

The distinguished author too, alas. Anyone who has read even a chapter of anything by a gay style icon such as Edmund White will be instantly familiar with *The Line of Beauty's* arresting mixture of sleaze and sensibility, furniture by Sheraton, sex courtesy of those old Frankie Goes to Hollywood videos, a pulsing vat of flaunted backsides and cultural superiority. An early postcard received by Nick from his holidaying landlord strikes the authenticating note: "a black-and-white picture of a Romanesque doorway, with flanking saints and a lively Last Judgment in the tympanum: Eglise de Podier, XII siecle". No Donald McGills for this boy then! A bit later Nick turns up for "pot-luck" at Lord Kessel's stately pile: "an exquisite light lunch served at a round table in a room lined with rococo *boiseries* that had been removed wholesale from some grand Parisian townhouse..." Plus a Cezanne above the fireplace, which gives Nick "a hilarious sense of his own social displacement".

Absolutely hilarious, yes. Plenty of excellent novels have, of course, been predicated on snobbery. What disables this one is Hollinghurst's own rapt implication in the flow of fine bindings, elegant *armoires* and pretty pictures, almost as if the author himself were sitting there at the end of that 18th century *chaise longue* or whatever pining to deliver some airy witticism about *The Spoils of Poynton*. Part of this has to do with the Jamesian prose style, ever searching for the apt conjunction of adverb and verb and noun and adjective but more often than not leaving the reader giggling in its wake. Thus an "unimpressionable tailback" on the A40, a sofa's "understanding depth", Nick growing "unseriously heavier" and so on.

More though is do with the high-grade linguistic and cultural gesturing, which Hollinghurst helpfully explains for the benefit of us grammar school thickies. Flakey Catherine, for example, suffers from "aichnophobia" – a fear of sharp objects, Hollinghurst thoughtfully glosses. Chatting to Wani's assistants – in the spirit of the times Nick and his boyfriend are aspiring film-makers – our hero mentions *The Outcry*, "a novel by Henry James that no one's ever read". Except Mr H here, you imagine. Curiously, messieurs and mesdames, the critics get horribly excited by this kind of thing, not realising that it is, in its quiet way, just as vulgar as the environment it sets out to anatomise. On the plus side, given a proper index it would make quite a decent antiques guide.

Books & Bookmen

■ **WITH a £72m pre-tax loss removing almost all of WH Smug's smugness (a venture capitalist has been invited to inspect the accounts with a view to making a bid) a big question mark hangs over the group's continuing ownership of Hodder Headline.**

CEO Kate "the dying" Swann has announced that the group is "in the business of maximising shareholder value". While this might surprise those who thought it was in the business of flogging books, newspapers and stationery, the chance to offload part of the business that never really fitted will be welcomed by shareholders.

Lagardere, the French owner of Orion, is thought to be interested and willing to pay Smug a decent amount more than the £185m it paid in 1999. So expect a round of "rationalisations" and "restructurings" (ie massive job losses) if Lagardere gets hold of Hodder Headline and folds it into Orion.

■ THE book trade in supermarkets is a brisk, high-volume business worth an estimated £100m a year. So why is the sector's main supplier of books, Cork International, in financial trouble?

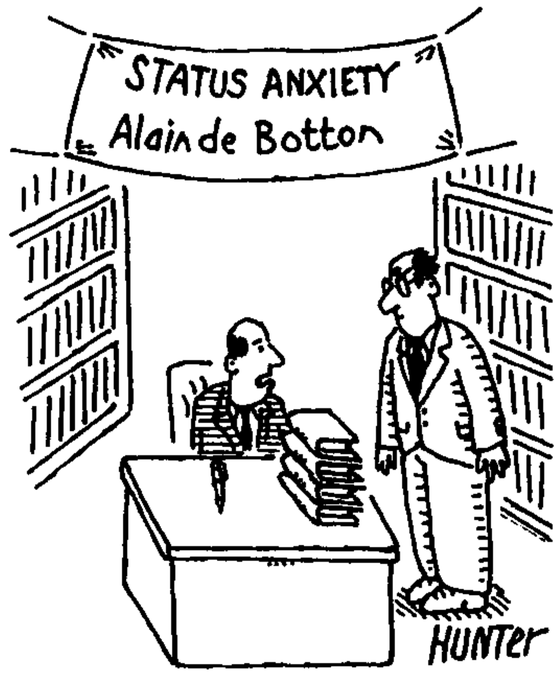
It owes vast sums to publishers and has been reduced to paying cash on delivery while it tries to raise money to clear its considerable debts.

In fact the real question is why this did not happen sooner. Supermarkets sell books like beans on the "pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap" principle, at discounts of up to 55 percent. To achieve this the supermarkets demand commensurate discounts with the publishers, who would rather receive more for their books but are loath to miss out on a gigantic order. In turn, the publishers negotiate reduced royalties for their authors. The difference is made up on the volume, the logic goes, although many best-selling writers regard this as debatable.

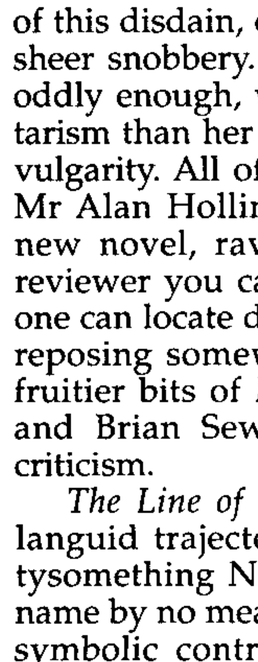
Cork, therefore, has to eke out a living in the flyleaf-thin area between the discounted trade price and the price on the shop floor. So, when the likes of Tesco demand even more discount, and the publishers, quite reasonably, say enough is enough, Cork is the one whose margin is squeezed.

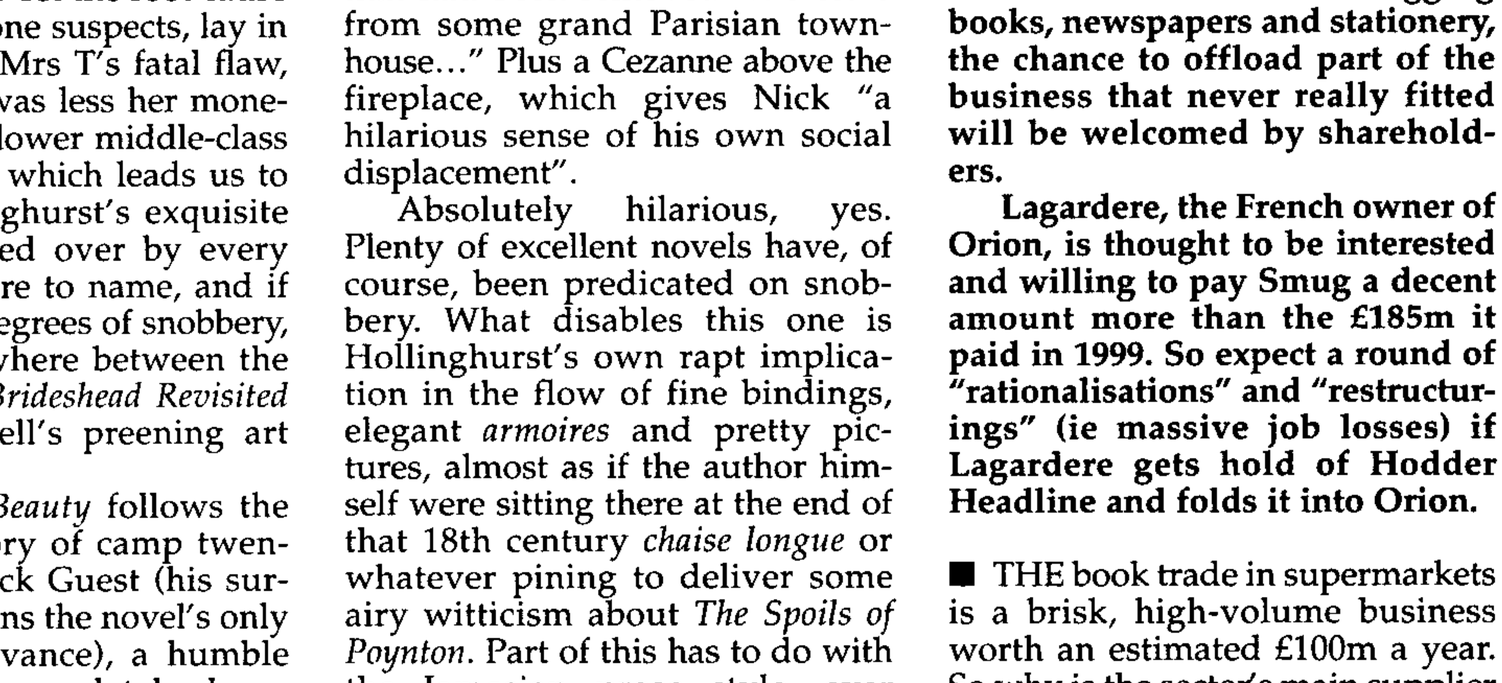
The result is that publishers will have to prop Cork up in the hope of getting their money back, or write off the cost of hundreds of thousands of copies of books, all the while preparing to supply the supermarkets direct if they have to. Longer term, the alternative would seem to be for publishers to pull out of the supermarket business or for supermarkets to settle for more realistic discounts, but neither is very likely. As with battery eggs and free-range, consumers are asked to make a trade-off between economy and ethics. In this case it's authors and publishers who are caged up and forced to lay.

'Bookworm'



"How many did Lynne Truss sell last week?"




THEY SAID IT WOULD BE OVER IN WEEKS – BUT IT JUST GOES ON AND ON....
NEWS
IRAQ LATEST
THANK GOD FOR THAT! HOORAH! PUBLISHING MISSION ACCOMPLISHED!
LATEST IRAQ BOOKS
THE IRAQ WAR
UNDER FIRE
WAR IN IRAQ
BOB WOODWARD PLAN OF ATTACK
WAR OVER IRAQ
ANOTHER IRAQ BOOK

O·B·N

At George Weidenfeld's dinner for Annabel Goldsmith he called her an 'upper-class Damon Runyon' – a brilliant description of a brilliant woman.

LEONIE FRIEDA
ES Magazine

Submitted by J. James

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

IN THE BACK

GOLDMAN SACHS

ODE TO JOYTI

THE big investment bank Goldman Sachs was acutely embarrassed by the four-month trial of its former personal secretary, Joyti De-Laurey.

Even when she was finally convicted (by 11 votes to one) on a host of charges that she stole more than £4m from her bosses at Goldmans, the bank was reluctant to comment. A spokesman did denounce the theft, however, as a "gross abuse of trust and an extremely unpleasant incident for all those affected".

Forging ahead: Joyti De-Laurey

Others were inclined to react to the conviction by exaggerating the resourcefulness and ingenuity of the former secretary. The *Financial Times* dubbed her a "queen of deceit". Scott Mead, the multi-millionaire Goldmans boss who was comprehensively fleeced by Mrs De-Laurey, described her as a "Picasso of con-men – she was brilliant", and another former boss, Ron Beller, said she was "a very clever con-artist".

But the facts of the case indicated that Mrs De-Laurey was not particularly clever. She made most of her ill-gotten gains by the not very brilliant trick of forging her bosses' names on cheques. The reason the bank took so many years to rumble the theft was that De-Laurey's bosses – Ron and Jennifer Beller and Scott Mead – were so fantastically rich that a few million missing here and there were easy to overlook.

The fact that a secretary was able to buy all sorts of luxuries and even a mansion in Cyprus was not remotely surprising since the bankers and their families were spending much more on expensive luxuries every day of the week. Nor was it true, as the bank's witnesses pretended, that forging cheques was a rarity at Goldmans. Another personal assistant to Mr Mead, Sophie Pemberton, told the court she was always forging cheques for Mr Mead who "never signed anything".

But compare the bankers' indignation about the "Con Queen" with the long statement issued nearly a year ago by William Donaldson, chairman of the US securities and exchange commission (SEC), about what the *Financial Times* called "the worst financial scandal in a generation". He fined a number of the world's top investment banks the enormous sum of £1.4bn. The central issue was bent research by "analysts" hired by the banks who fiddled the figures to deceive shareholders into the mistaken belief that stocks, especially telecoms stocks, were worth buying when in fact they were junk. The analysts explained that their crooked behaviour was inspired by the desire to boost the business and shares of the banks that employed them.

Goldman Sachs was fined $110m, some 20 times more that Mrs De-Laurey managed to steal. The bank's approach was summed up by one of its analysts who was asked to list his three most important goals for the year 2000. He replied that all three were "to get more investment banking revenue".

In August of that year the head of European telecoms at Goldman Sachs explained how he managed to keep up the highest investment rating for telecoms stocks even though they had been "tanking for three to four months". A mild way of describing this behaviour would be "a gross abuse of trust and an unpleasant experience for all affected" – especially the swindled shareholders. Another perhaps more graphic description of the telecoms sector analysts of Goldman Sachs at the time would be "kings of deceit" or "Picassos of con-men".

PS: The investment bank swindle was not exclusively American. As *Eye* 1080 noted, the British regulator, the financial services authority (FSA), found last year that the same sort of swindling with bent analysts' reports to investment banks was rife in Britain. But the FSA chairman Sir Howard Davies decided, in the interests of private enterprise, not to intervene. Sir Howard now has a new job at Morgan Stanley investment bank (which was fined $125m in the US for the bent analysts swindle).

PPS: When Tony Blair wanted a venue to make a "keynote" speech last month on the state of the British economy, he chose the London headquarters of Goldman Sachs. The background to the podium was plastered with the words "Prosperity" and "Stability" and Blair's lectern carried the message: "Goldman Sachs – Britain is Winning."

Gordon Brown-nosing

CHANCELLOR Gordon Brown took sycophancy to new levels when he opened a new HQ for the Lehman Brothers merchant bank in London this month.

He grovelled: "In thanking you for your invitation, let me at the outset pay tribute to all of you here – executives, employees, representatives of the financial sector, all 3,100 staff of Lehman's here in Canary Wharf – for the contribution you and your company make to the prosperity of Britain, the enterprise you show and the difference you make."

On and on he droned, "wishing Lehman Brothers the success it deserves for its future" and thanking it "for the privilege of being here… Lehman Brothers is a great company today that can both look backwards with pride and look forwards with hope".

Look backwards with pride? Just a minute. The bank was fined $50m in 2002 for its involvement in the "pump and dump" share scandal in the US, but Brown must have forgotten about this.

Nor did he refer to the bank's close involvement with Enron. Last December an American federal judge ruled that Lehman Brothers could not escape the class action being brought by investors against Enron's erstwhile allies. Americans who lost millions in Enron claim Lehman Brothers was a key player in the series of fraudulent transactions that created a "mythical picture" of Enron's profitability. In particular it helped set up LJM2, an Enron "front" that made imaginary contributions to Enron's profits by "buying" the firm's assets.

But Gordon was too discreet to mention any of this – or Lehman Brothers' pay-out of $1.7m in January to avoid prosecution for the fraudulent deals of its rogue trader Frank Gruttadauria. Nor did he refer to the £27m it had had to pay out in its 1994 settlement of the Maxwell pensions swindle.

Instead he promised: "We will continue to look with you at the business tax regime so that we provide incentives for investment in wealth creation and greater rewards for success." In fact Lehman Brothers already knows where money is best spent: it is currently the seventh largest contributor to George W. Bush's re-election campaign in the US.

Apaches grounded

HOW convenient for defence secretary Geoff Hoon that his new special adviser, James Connal, is the personal business manager of Lord Dennis Stevenson, chairman of the Halifax/Bank of Scotland group, HBOS.

The Bank of Scotland has big business with the ministry of defence, profiting from some huge private finance initiative schemes, including refurbishment of the MoD's London headquarters and financing the PFI deal to train pilots for Apache helicopters.

Unfortunately the latter scheme has been a fiasco. The MoD paid £37m of taxpayers' money for training courses that never happened. The delays mean that Apaches are being mothballed and it is unlikely the helicopter will be with UK defence forces next year as planned.

Crossbencher Lord Stevenson is already close to Tony Blair and funded the creation of Labour-linked lobbyist, Lexington Communications. Before working for Stevenson, Connal chaired the Young Fabians. To complete the lobby-jobby circle, Hoon's previous special adviser Richard Taylor left to work for Tim Allan's new lobbying firm, Portland.

CANCER RESEARCH

Patently absurd

MYRIAD

WHEN the American bio-pharmaceutical company Myriad Genetics announced on 15 April that it had "licensed exclusive rights" for a gene which can be used to detect and predict colon cancer, its share price shot up.

Myriad Genetics also holds patents on several other cancer-related genes, including the US rights to a hereditary breast cancer gene (BRCA2). The patents allow it to charge a licence fee for every single use in research or patient testing. In 2001, public health authorities in Ontario kicked up a fuss, pointing out that Myriad was charging Can $3,950 per patient for a test the Canadians could do for $800 if the gene involved were not patented. It has been fighting the issue through the courts ever since.

In February this year, meanwhile, the UK-based charity Cancer Research scored a coup in this battle to keep genes in the public domain by snatching up the Europe-wide patent on the BRCA2 gene to keep it available for research. It will now allow any non-profit making laboratory to use the patented gene for free – although it will retain all commercial rights.

The BRCA2 gene was actually discovered at the Institute for Cancer Research in the UK in 1995 by scientists at Cambridge University, led by Professor Mike Stratton, who were opposed to the patenting of genes. Cancer Research has always held the UK patent but quick legal work by Myriad meant it landed the US patent.

Getting the European patent cost the charity around £100,000 in legal fees – money well spent as it will save researchers in hospitals and universities hundreds of thousands of pounds in the long run. However, the question remains, when other important genes are patented, who will pay for them to be kept available to scientists?

This question is currently being addressed in Germany, where parliament is debating a new law to allow public-sector scientists free use of patented gene sequences. Last year the European Commission referred Germany, Austria, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden to the European court of justice because, unlike the UK, none of them had implemented the 1998 directive on "protection" of biotechnological inventions. Germany's Greens and Social Democrats hope their proposed law will meet the European patenting law by granting commercial rights while still permitting researchers to work with the genetic material.

POLICE 5

Prime suspects

INVESTIGATIONS into dodgy dealings in Greater Manchester police's Stockport division took a new twist last week when officers involved in "Operation Prime" – which was supposed to spread good practice – were suspended or warned over allegations against them of misconduct.

Stockport gained notoriety for persuading local villains to confess to crimes they hadn't committed (and in some cases couldn't have committed) to improve the division's appalling clear-up rates. So far seven officers have been disciplined over the "taken-into-consideration" (TIC) scandal, and crooks who were genuinely responsible for hundreds of crimes in the area have got away scot-free.

One officer given a written warning about his part in the clear-up scandal was Det Chief Inspector Kenny Caldwell. Almost unbelievably he has now been allowed to retire on a full pension – despite a second investigation into claims that he perverted the course of justice by deliberately withholding vital evidence and lying during the trial of six men accused of murder (see *Eye* 1103).

Before the clear-up fraud was uncovered (and there were already loud whispers going round that the figures were far too good to be true), news of Stockport's "success" had reached the ears of the home office and even Tony Blair. Knacker of Greater Manchester wanted to capitalise on this and see if the "success" could be replicated throughout the force. Thus Operation Prime, named after the PM himself, was launched with the help of home office funding.

Now that appears to have gone pear-shaped too, with action being taken against two Prime officers and another Stockport constable. GMP points out that these allegations relating to "alleged mishandling of informants and procedures for handling informants" is not connected to the recent and ongoing investigation into irregularities in TIC crimes. So that's all right then.

Blears blah blah

AFTER last week's conviction of Craig Harman for killing a lorry driver by hurling a brick from a motorway bridge, home office minister Hazel Blears and Surrey police boasted a "world first" in trapping a culprit through a relative's DNA profile.

Harman had been traced after a relative's DNA on the database showed a close match. "This is the first instance anywhere in the world in which this technique has helped to bring a killer to justice," said Blears, getting in a government law and order plug after Harman's conviction for the manslaughter of Michael Little.

But it was not a world first nor even a UK first. In the controversial 1988 Lynette White murder case in south Wales – for which the so-called Cardiff Three had famously been convicted and then exonerated – a DNA profile of the actual murderer was eventually obtained from the crime scene.

As in the Harman case, it could not be matched with anyone on the national DNA database. But the real murderer, Jeffrey Gafoor, was apprehended after the DNA profile of his 14-year-old nephew did appear on the database. Gafoor was finally convicted in July 2003.

Blears' "world first" was nine months too late; but then she wouldn't have wanted to remind anyone about the Cardiff miscarriage of justice that had taken 14 years to put right.

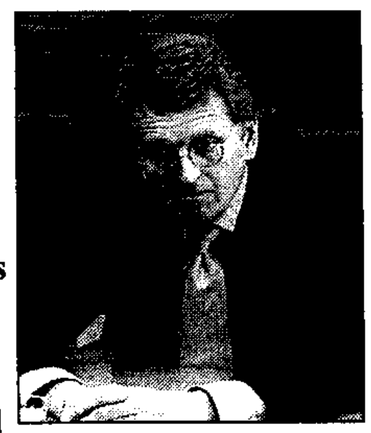
Knackerspeak

VIEWERS who contacted Humberside police to complain after seeing Channel 4's *Rough Justice* programme about the dreadful death on a police station floor of Christopher Alder (see *Eyes passim*) thought it must have been a dreadful error when Humberside's response came from something called the "quality of life policing strategy unit".

Trying to find out what this unit was about was equally baffling, however. "The purpose of the Quality of Life Policing Strategy Unit is to promote Quality of Life Policing as a strategy to internal, external and national audiences through our corporate publications, which include our Force Blueprint, Annual Reports, Policing Plans, and annual public consultation survey."

MAN IN THE EYE

Meyer culpa



SIR Christopher Meyer (pictured right), chair of the press complaints commission (PCC), appears not to have learnt the lessons of his predecessor, Lord "Fixit" Wakeham, about the pitfalls of signing up for lots of lucrative but hazardous directorships.

Wakeham had to resign from the PCC after becoming enmeshed in the Enron scandal, but critics had long claimed his many outside interests conflicted with his role as press watchdog. Meyer now seems to be heading the same way.

Soon after taking over the PCC (£155,000 a year for a three-day week), the former man in Washington and press secretary to John Major "went plural" and joined a number of company boards. He needed the permission of foreign secretary Jack Straw to join the arms giant GKN; but in November he also took up a directorship with Riggs National Corporation, the Washington financial house that dominates the influential and lucrative market of diplomatic banking.

Riggs Bank, its main subsidiary, is currently under investigation, however, by no fewer than five US agencies and three congressional committees. The FBI, two US treasury department agencies and the US financial crimes enforcement network are all probing Sir Christopher's new employer for failing to report millions of dollars in suspicious transactions.

Last week the *Washington Post* reported that the US agencies are focusing on dozens of large cash withdrawals and transfers, totalling over $50m (often several million in one go) from Saudi Arabia's diplomatic, employee and personal accounts.

Riggs is also accused of failing to alert regulators over suspicious activity relating to accounts run by President Obiang of Equatorial Guinea, the small oil-rich African state that has recently been the target of an alleged coup led by a British mercenary, Simon Mann. Investigators are examining whether oil companies were paying bribes and helping EG's leaders acquire US real estate.

The FBI and others started looking into Riggs after the 11 September terrorist attacks and found that dozens of dubious large transactions had not been reported. The *Washington Post* says federal bank regulators are about to impose massive fines on the bank for not reporting the suspicious transactions and have notified bank officers and directors that they might be sanctioned individually.

As he has only recently joined the board, presumably Sir Christopher will not be one of them. But shouldn't he have checked out the company he was keeping before he joined?

Follow-ups... Follow-ups...Follow-ups...

■ **ANDREW WAKEFIELD:** The *Lancet* has finally given Dr Andrew Wakefield the right to reply to allegations that he failed to declare a "fatal" conflict of interest – that he was working for the MMR litigants – when his first controversial paper was published in the journal in 1998.

Wakefield and two of the paper's other original authors deny any conflict. They say that the 12 children reported in their clinical study were referred exclusively to them for investigation of their intestinal symptoms. At the time none was involved in litigation over the MMR vaccine (the first court proceedings over which were not started until several months after publication of the original paper).

In their *Lancet* letter they said: "The findings were interpreted and reported by clinicians who could have had no knowledge of any future claim." Legal Aid funding they were receiving was for laboratory support for a completely separate viral study and will be declared, they said, when that study is published.

The letter was originally submitted to the *Lancet* back in February after editor Richard Horton said Wakefield's study would not have been published had he known of the legal aid work. His comments gave health chiefs and others another opportunity to seek to discredit Dr Wakefield's work.

But as the *Eye* has already reported, the issue of legal aid funding was actually debated in the *Lancet* shortly after the controversial paper was published six years ago – and there was no suggestion of withdrawing it then. Since then the science has moved on with the discovery of vaccine strain measles virus at the site of the children's gut inflammation.

While considering the contents of Wakefield's letter, Horton chose to publish another one from the other authors of the 1998 paper who "issued a retraction of interpretation" – though not a retraction of the factual findings of a unique gut disease. That again prompted a flurry of anti-Wakefield stories.

Only last year, in his book *Second Opinion*, Horton had defended the Wakefield paper and said that he had no regret over publishing it. He pointed out that Wakefield had subsequently published "extensively" about the risks of MMR vaccine and measles infection and that the gastroenterologist's reputation was "unfairly in tatters".

So can the resurrection of the issue of legal aid, six years later, really have changed that? Horton maintains that though Wakefield had said in 1998 that he had "agreed to help evaluate some children for the then Legal Aid Board", the journal had assumed that he would do that after the paper was published. A fine distinction, when it comes to the serious accusation of conflict of interest.

■ **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST:** Some parents have been concerned that Dr Evan Harris, the pro-MMR Lib Dem MP who raised the recent *Sunday Times* article about Wakefield and others in parliament, had not declared that he himself was a "fellow" with GlaxoSmithKline, one of the defendant drug companies.

Harris is one of more than 340 MPs who have taken advantage of the Industry and Parliamentary Trust, which builds bridges between business and legislators. Companies pay in to the non-profit trust which awards fellowships to MPs who attach themselves to the company to "improve their education and understanding". As they are not paid by the company, it is considered unnecessary to declare an interest. Harris points out that when he went to GSK in South Africa, he paid for his own flight and did not reclaim it from the trust, because he was already in Africa looking into his main area of concern, which is Aids.

The Wonderful World of PFI

Grinning with Glee-son

TORY peer Lord Selsdon made an instructive contribution to a Lords' debate on the private finance initiative (PFI) recently, complaining how unions, public sector values and the governors of schools and hospitals all conspire to get in the way of good old private enterprise.

Selsdon is a non-executive director of the MJ Gleeson Group, one of the firms trying to take over Britain's public sector via PFI projects. And though he said he was pleasantly surprised by the amount of business Labour was putting his firm's way, not all was unalloyed joy on the road to private riches.

As he complained: "[The] problem with the public sector is that, in general, it has a different culture from the private sector". He moaned about "problems when dealing with UNISON" and said that school and hospital governors could be equally irritating. On occasions they "can disrupt the progress of the construction contract quite considerably and cause delays".

As for school PFIs: "One often has to deal with local authorities and governors, who may sometimes wish to disrupt the very objectives that the Government set at the beginning."

Selsdon clearly believes the public bit of public private partnerships should keep its mouth shut. But it hasn't stopped his firm from leading consortia that run schools in the Highlands and hospitals in Luton and Tooting. It is currently bidding for a £30m PFI at Sheffield's Northern General Hospital.

Selsdon's vision of how the PFI could develop is instructive too. He suggested PFI schools could make even more money by being "used for temporary homes, for students visiting the country or for tourists. The point is that the infrastructure – the buildings themselves – is not necessarily used throughout a full year." Of course if the children weren't there, schools could make even more money as shopping malls, health clubs or garden centres…

Milburn nurses his ambition

WHAT happened to former socialist firebrand Alan Milburn, who left his cabinet job as health secretary to spend more time with his family?

Readers can now track him down him via a rather remote "private equity firm" called Bridgepoint, whose advisory council he joined last month at an undisclosed salary. Bridgepoint has been in the news recently as the proposed purchaser of the PFI/PPP business, modestly called Global Solutions Ltd, of Group Four Falck.

This was an extensive and expensive portfolio including prisons such as HMP Altcourse and Rye Hill, the newly-rebuilt Yarls Wood detention centre and the ongoing £450m PFI project at the government's spy centre GCHQ.

Milburn's expertise as a former health secretary will be of special value to the equity fund, if and when it buys Global Solutions. The portfolio also includes companies called Firstpoint Healthcare and Match, which provides agency nurses to short-staffed NHS hospitals. The latter really took off in 1999 when Milburn was health secretary.

Bridgepoint explains its business on its website as follows: "Our style is that of an active investor, working in partnership with experienced managers who have the energy and ability to build businesses and deliver superior performance. In return, we motivate the managers we back through equity participation, allowing them to realise significant financial rewards from the value they create." This probably means the managers of the hospitals and prisons and GCHQ can make yet more money by flogging off the PFI/PPP business yet again, and so on, ad infinitum.

Off-balancing act

HEY PRESTO… the cost of another hugely expensive PFI hospital has just found its way off the balance sheet of the government – and off the balance sheet of the private consortium that built it.

The Queen Elizabeth Hospital in Woolwich is the second most expensive PFI hospital in the recent batch. But its cost (£118m) is not accounted for in the accounts of the firm that built it, Meridian Hospital Company Ltd. Rather, the auditor of the company, PKF, says the cost should be on the government's balance sheet.

Naturally it isn't there either, because for chancellor Gordon Brown the whole point of PFI is to pretend that the government is not spending money on PFI hospital projects (for which taxpayers will be forking out huge sums for the next 30 years or so).

For the moment there is a stand-off; and in accounting terms the hospitals don't appear to have cost anyone anything. But how long can this go on?

Aiming for Amey

ANOTHER prestigious director has joined the board of the troubled PFI company Amey. He is Sir Patrick Brown, who from 1991 to 1997 was permanent secretary at the department of transport where he supervised the disastrous privatisation of the railways.

In 1999, two years after leaving the ministry, he became chairman of three privatised rail operating companies, including Thames Trains, recently convicted and fined £2m for the Ladbroke Grove rail crash.

PS: Amey recently signed a contract for £38m worth of rail track renewal.

PPS: The new Amey-sponsored Unity City Academy at Middlesbrough is scheduled to open in its new building later this year. Amey at first predicted the "academy" (school) would cost £10m, then £16m. Now the department for education and skills tells the *Eye* it will cost £20.5m. Par for the PPP course.

Motorway madness

The impact of the private finance initiative on our roads will be seen when repairs are belatedly carried out on the crowded M6 motorway around Birmingham.

Work was deferred while a new relief road – a PFI creation operated by Midland Expressway Ltd (MEL) – was being built because, so the thinking went, once the new road was open there would be far fewer lorries using the old M6.

Alas, MEL has set prices for lorries so much higher than it promised (see *Eye* 1096) that no more than 1,500 trucks use the new toll road a day while around 45,000 stick with the old road, according to the Freight Transport Association (FTA). That means less wear and tear for the private owners but ever more pressing maintenance on the state-funded road.

The FTA says MEL has told the Highways Agency it won't reduce its tolls while the deferred roadworks close parts of the old M6. And why should it? Its new road is a privately-owned asset in a capitalist economy and MEL's duty is to maximise profits by charging the maximum the market will bear. And if journeys on the old road become even slower during maintenance, MEL would theoretically have an opportunity to temporarily *increase* its tolls.

Shaky foundations

ALTHOUGH ten hospitals became NHS foundation trusts on 1 April, the department of health (DoH) is still making its mind up about what should happen if (or when) a foundation trust goes bankrupt.

A consultation on changes to how the insolvency act applies to foundation hospitals is still underway, with those who were invited to comment – mainly big accountancy firms like Ernst & Young – not due to give their answers until 7 May.

Is the government at long last learning that continually bailing out failed private finance initiatives (PFIs) and privatised infrastructure companies is not a good use of taxpayers' money? Perhaps. The proposed set up for foundation hospitals is to be slightly different and will require some tweaking to the current laws on bankrupt companies.

In simple terms, essential NHS assets, services, staff and contracts will be "protected" from creditors and would be transferred back to the DoH in the same way that mortgaged property belonging to an insolvent company would be seized by the mortgage lender rather than shared between creditors. Any private sector company dealing with the trust will therefore be taking the equivalent credit risk of dealing with a company which is mortgaged to the hilt. Anything deemed "non-essential" will, of course, be snapped up by the private sector.

In last October's House of Lords debate on the matter, Lord Warner said: "It is an essential aspect of the new disciplines being placed on management, as the quid pro quo for the additional freedoms that come with foundation status, that the secretary of state will not guarantee debt. In the event of failure, the government will of course stand behind NHS patients and essential NHS services – that is, protected services. We will not stand behind or bail out poor management."

Bizarrely, however, there *is* one way foundation trusts will be able to get government to guarantee their debts. Foundation trusts will be allowed to enter into PFI deals for both clinical and non-clinical services – even so far as to subcontract the entire running of the hospital – and as with any PFI deal, the government will guarantee all debts to the private sector. "The secretary of state would be able to undertake a 'deed of safeguard', accepting the obligation to pay sums due under the PFI contract if they were not paid by the NHS foundation trust," Lord Warner told the Lords.

So, still willing to shell out to the private sector to keep ropy PFI deals afloat, but prepared to see hospitals go bankrupt, with all the ensuing chaos. Have any lessons really been learnt at all? We shall see.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

FULHAM's football fortunes may have improved this season but its finances continue to represent an huge drain on the stretched resources of its owner, the phoney pharaoh Mohamed Fayed.

The latest accounts for Fulham Football Leisure, the British Virgin Islands-owned company which in turn owns the Premiership club, reveal that by the end of last season Fayed had pumped a remarkable £91m into Fulham, all interest free. This compared with £74m in June 2002.

A further £17.6m has been advanced to the club from another Fayed pocket, Harrods. That lifeline had grown by more than half from £12.1m the year before. Fulham does pay interest on that money: over 7 percent.

Add on a £15m returnable deposit – repayable plus interest at 12 percent – linked to the possible future redevelopment of Fulham's Thames-side Craven Cottage ground into luxury flats, and it can be seen how net debt for the club owner now stands at a daunting £115m! This makes even the debt problems of Leeds, which had to be rescued from the edge of administration, seem bearable.

How Fayed has funded Fulham is certain to be a matter of great interest to the Inland Revenue which continues to probe his personal finances and modest tax payments – the reason Fayed is now a tax exile. The only possible sources appear to be the recycling of tax-free dividends from Harrods and its cash flow or borrowings by the Knightsbridge store or the Paris Ritz.

Certainly Fulham is in no position to contribute. Revenues last year were just over £1m higher at £33.6m. But with players' salaries rising from just under £31m to £36m, the operating loss, after adjusting for the 2002 write-offs against player values, rose from £20.7m to £22.2m. Add another £1m in interest charges, and after profits from transfers the net loss was £20.8m compared with an adjusted £21.6m for 2002. Ever the optimist, the pharaoh forecasts that the club will "become financially stable before too long" and that the current year will show "even more significant improvement"!

Since Fayed bought Fulham in 1997 (William and Andrew Muddyman who sold the club to Fayed have now resigned and reduced their shareholding), the losses have now exceeded £103m. This is the biggest haemorrhage of cash in British football history.

Just how long Fayed can continue pouring money into the black and white Fulham hole is increasingly relevant given the poor performance of his other main assets and the bank debt burden they carry. Which may explain the rumours last year that his friend, the Thai prime minister Thaksin Shinawatra, wanted to buy. It certainly explains the sale of star striker Louis Saha to Manchester United for £12m after declaring he was not for sale. But even that increased the net cash inflow from transfers by only £4.6m.

The problem for Fayed is that whoever bought Fulham would be unlikely to want to assume/repay the £91m Fayed borrowings which are not repayable before 2008 and mostly not until 2017. Just how much is a middle-ranking Premiership club losing £22m a year and with debts of £107m worth? Not a lot. Any escape route for Fayed, as with the Leeds lenders, would involve taking a big hit and hoping for a modest additional recovery down the line.

The only hope of financial rescue may well lie in the redevelopment plan – if that happens. Fayed estimates that the pay-off could be £50m, of which he has already received and spent £15m which has to be repaid if the project doesn't happen.

"He's worrying the sheep again!"

Meanwhile Craven Cottage is in the middle of a £5.4m conversion into an all-seater stadium ready for next season. The new stadium is to be occupied for "an initial period of three years" while Fayed looks for a new Fulham home to enable the redevelopment to go ahead.

When the redevelopment deal was signed two years ago, the suggestion was that a new home would have been found so that work would begin by September 2005. But as the club is now expecting to be resident until at least 2007 that puts the project almost over the horizon, especially as planning permission has still to be applied for.

All of which suggests Mo's cheque book will be needed for a good while yet to keep Fulham in business.

MEANWHILE just a short walk across west London at Chelsea, Russian benefactor Roman Abramovich has run into a little British legal flak with aluminium group RusAl which he co-owns with fellow oligarch Oleg Deripaska.

The former Russian Aluminium is the largest player in that industry back home, having emerged from the bloody, mob-linked aluminium wars of the 1990s. Ever eager to reduce his exposure in Russia and pocket cash abroad before he suffers the fate of jailed rival oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Abramovich recently sold half his RusAl stake to Deripaska who now owns 75 percent of the metals group.

RusAl tried to cancel an agreement under which an offshore company was paid fees relating to the operations of an alumina refinery in the west African state of Guinea, which it acquired in 2002, and reclaim payments made since 1999.

The offshore company Tekron Resources sued in the high court to enforce its agreement. Last November it won, despite the RusAl camp claiming that the representational agreement was essentially corrupt and so unenforceable. An interesting position where Russian companies and offshore entities are concerned!

Tekron not only won hands down but Mr Justice Jack was highly critical of the tactics of RusAl's representatives. "Under threat of litigation in London RusAl have done what they can to blacken the names of Tekron and its principles in Guinea," declared the judge.

RusAl had been seeking to avoid paying $3.5m to Tekron and reclaiming $9.4m already paid under the 1999 agreement which resulted in the state-owned Fria refinery being backed by US and Greek interests under a 25-year deal with the Guinea government. Tekron is owned by three Lebanese, Canadian and Iranian middlemen who negotiated that deal in return for a $4m commission and a percentage on every ton of alumina produced.

RusAl bought out the foreign investors in the refinery in December 2002 and quickly "determined that it was not going to honour the representation agreement" with Tekron. The offshore company duly sued in February last year.

Mr Justice Jack found that the Tekron agreement was neither illegal nor corrupt and was enforceable. "It is too late, three years on, for [the aluminium refinery company] to seek to withdraw," he concluded. He was also unimpressed with some of the evidence presented by the RusAl camp, describing some of it as "nonsense".

Why RusAl wants out of the Tekron agreement is not hard to see. The annual commission on alumina sales is put at $3.75m. Over the life of the agreement those fees could total $90m and could have a value if sold of $30m to $40m. As the judge remarked : "Some may find it objectionable on moral grounds that such large sums should be earned, effectively by three individuals, for services such as provided here, in particular in the context of the impoverished state of Guinea." But that morality was not an issue in the case.

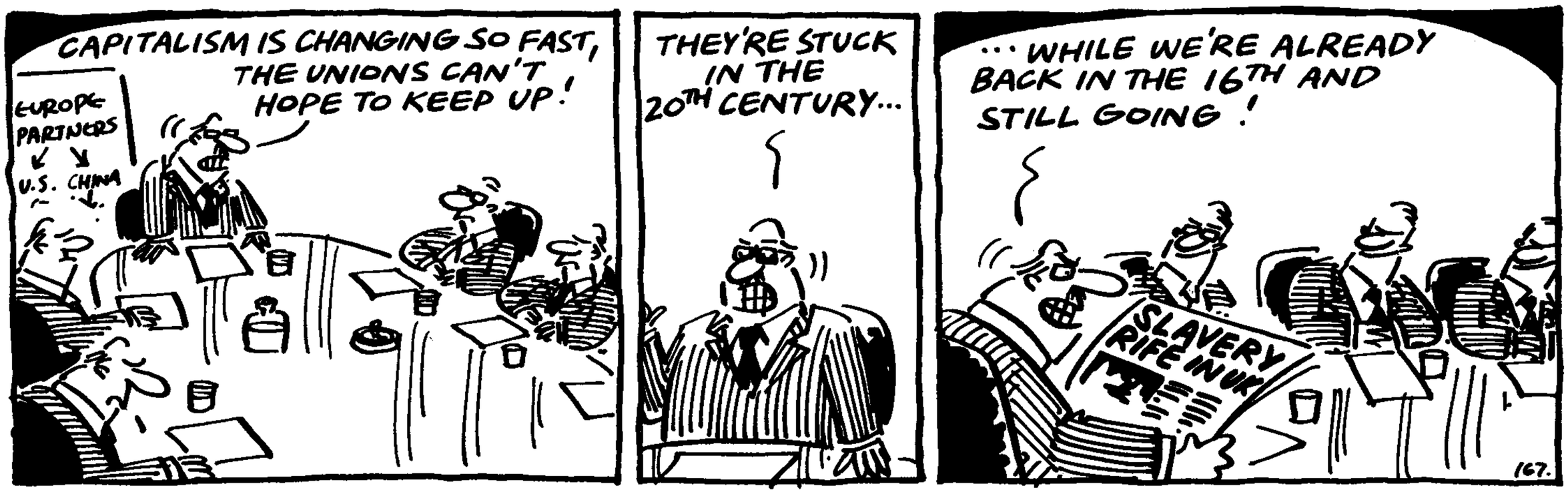
Whether RusAl, whose owners Deripaska (75 percent) and Abramovich (25 percent) know all about the morality of extracting large sums from impoverished countries via offshore havens, will play that moral card at the appeal due later this year remains to be seen.

Meanwhile Oleg Deripaska, though free to visit Britain and his friends Lord Jacob Rothschild and son Nat, remains unable to obtain a visa to visit the United States. For some unfathomable and unjustified reason the American authorities seem to think he and/or RusAl have links to Russian organised crime.

MILLIONAIRE Greville Howard is this week due to be named among the working peers

(continued overleaf)

THE DIRECTORS — DREDGE & RIGG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Stock Horror

by 'Bruin'

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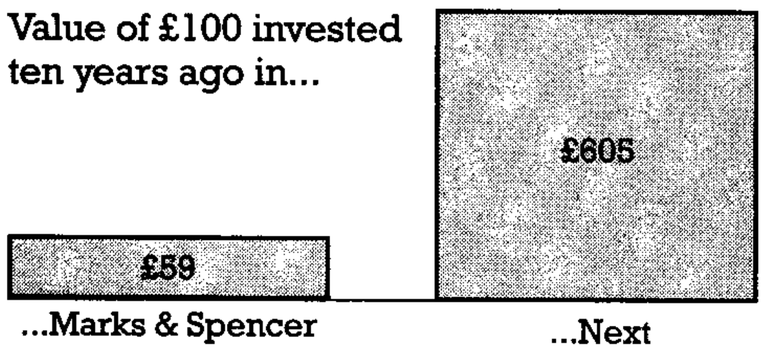
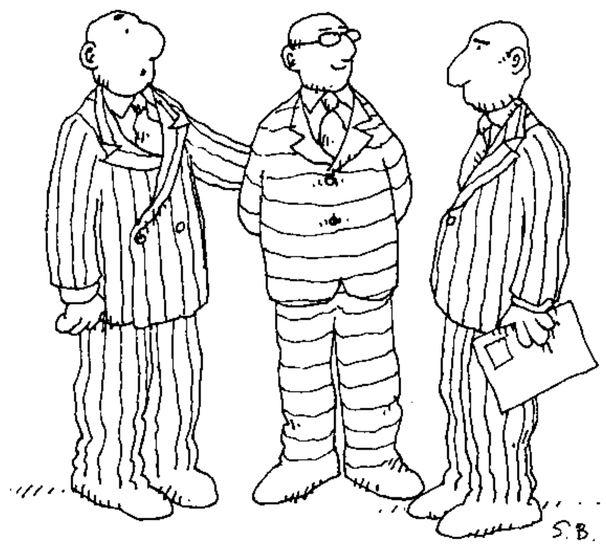


on the Tory side in the House of Lords in the latest peerage pay back to political cronies and donors.

The peerage for this scion of the land-owning Howards (the Norfolk not the Romanian branch of the family) is – no doubt – unfairly attributed to his financial backing to former Tory leader Iain Duncan Smith who was paid up to £100,000 as a consultant by Howard companies over four years.

Greville H is no stranger to older *Private Eye* readers. A one-time associate of Jim Slater and close friend and Clermont chum of Sir James



"And this is Robinson, our lateral thinker"

Goldsmith, Howard featured dramatically in the events leading up to the disappearance of Lord Lucan in 1974. Howard was one of the last to see Lucan alive. Lucan confessed that he was thinking of murdering his wife – which he tried to do before fleeing after killing their children's nanny instead. Despite this crucial information Howard was "unable" to attend the inquest claiming a "bad back" had put him in hospital.

Today the future Lord Howard runs Fortress Holdings, one of the paymasters for IDS, which has failed to set the stock market alight despite sitting on a pile of cash from selling its electrical business in 1999. Howard has resisted reinvesting the cash in new acquisitions or paying a cash dividend. Instead he has embarked on a policy of utilising the money to buy in the company's own shares.

In the past three years Fortress has reduced its share capital from over 65m shares to 47.5m. The cash pile has as a result been reduced from almost £19m to £14m. But the company is currently valued at just over £12m with the shares marooned around 26p, just below the level at which shareholders in January 2003 approved the latest cancellation policy. Over the past two years Fortress has substantially under-performed the all-share index, despite reducing the share float.

Just how shareholders have benefited from this strategy is hard to see. However, one shareholder who is somewhat better off is the future peer. He is the largest shareholder in Fortress with 6m shares. By not selling or buying any shares while buying in a large number of other investors' shares, the Howard stake in Fortress has risen from something over 9 percent to now approaching 13 percent.

All perfectly legal and transparent… but wouldn't shareholders appreciate something which made the shares worth more rather than merely strengthening the chairman's shareholding and thereby gain from any future transaction?

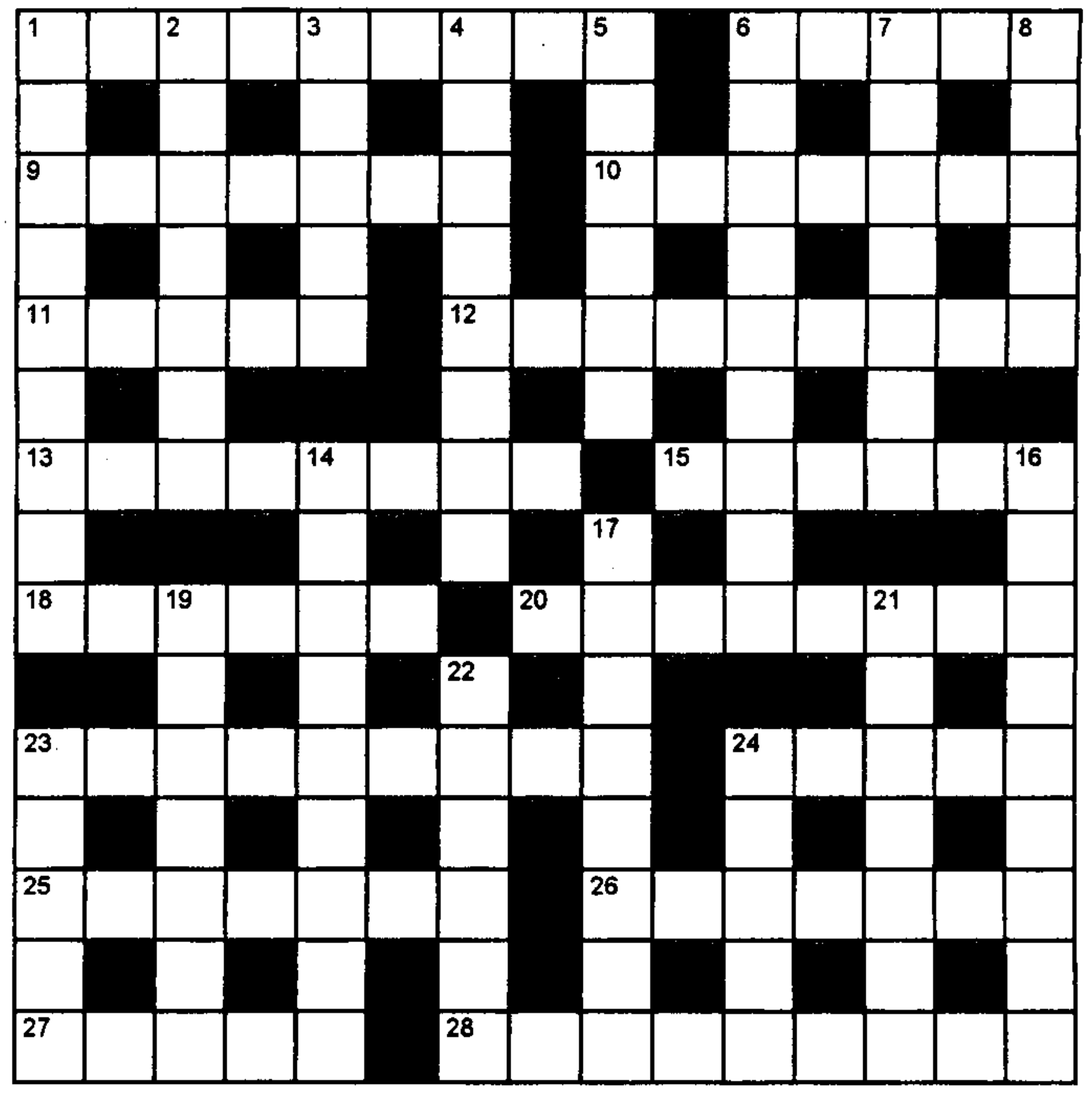
'Slicker'

EYE CROSSWORD 260

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 7 May 2004.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1 Madonna-like singer's tiptop pair possibly fingered by player (9)
6 Reaction on getting wind of cup size on old movie star (not West) (5)
9 Spend a lot of time chasing whip round Oxford University (4,3)
10 One who encourages holding Pole's cock (7)
11 Guardsman's pointless penetration (5)
12 Where big concessions were made by John, like a drip (on the old booze, by the sound of it) (9)
13/20 He'd put a spin on "PM Blair all at sea without head of communications" (8,8)
15 Prince is extremely sexy? – more fuss-pot than sex-pot! (6)
18 Bollocking is all an organ can take (6)
20 See 13
23 Piss-artist ballsed up local choir no end (9)
24 Chip, corny Spanish American he-man needs to change his top (5)
25 Tacitus's kinky slinky outfit (7)
26 Military type knocked back drink, like, before one-to-one (7)
27 Vulgar rubbish, including "Blair's Last Path" (5)
28 Right "sea change" – leader of Conservatives put inside Berlin building (9)

DOWN

1 Election split by Liberal mug's U-turn (5-4)
2 Famous Stone, frayed at the edges, a museum piece now (7)
3 "Blair on youth" has a certain self-mockery? (5)
4 Do it arse about, as the space traveller? (8)
5 Whom to consult if you fail to maintain erection? (6)
6 When, say, Labour tit does a U-turn, it could catch you out (9)
7 Landlords, if pursuing French johnnies (7)
8 Lots went shagging, so to speak (5)
14 Hard to get a shag with new top? So sorry about that (5,4)
16 Willy gone wrinkly and turning jaundiced? (9)
17 Screwing Iris can, if end of penis gets caught inside bloomers (8)
19 Cheesy fare Rita spread round bed (7)
21 Clip – but round tip of ear (7)
22 Provincial place's lust is about ... about ... about ... (6)
23 ... racy females flaunting what they've got up top here (5)
24 Woody girl gets Allen happy finally on speed (5)

Crossword 259 winner: ADRIAN RILEY

ACROSS: 1/6 Congestion Zone 9 Mix-up 10 Erections 12 Towel rail 13 Oxfam 14 Crabby 16 Pit bull 19 Oddment 21 Carnal 23 Mucus 25 Knocked up 27 Gallstone 28 Broad 29 Tank 30 Straplines.

DOWN: 1 Come to 2 Next world 3 Expel 4 Therapy 5 Overlap 7 On-off 8 Ensemble 11 Trotter 15 Breasts 17 Up and down 18 Pommy git 20 Take out 21 Cholera 22 Spades 24 Colon 26 Kabul.

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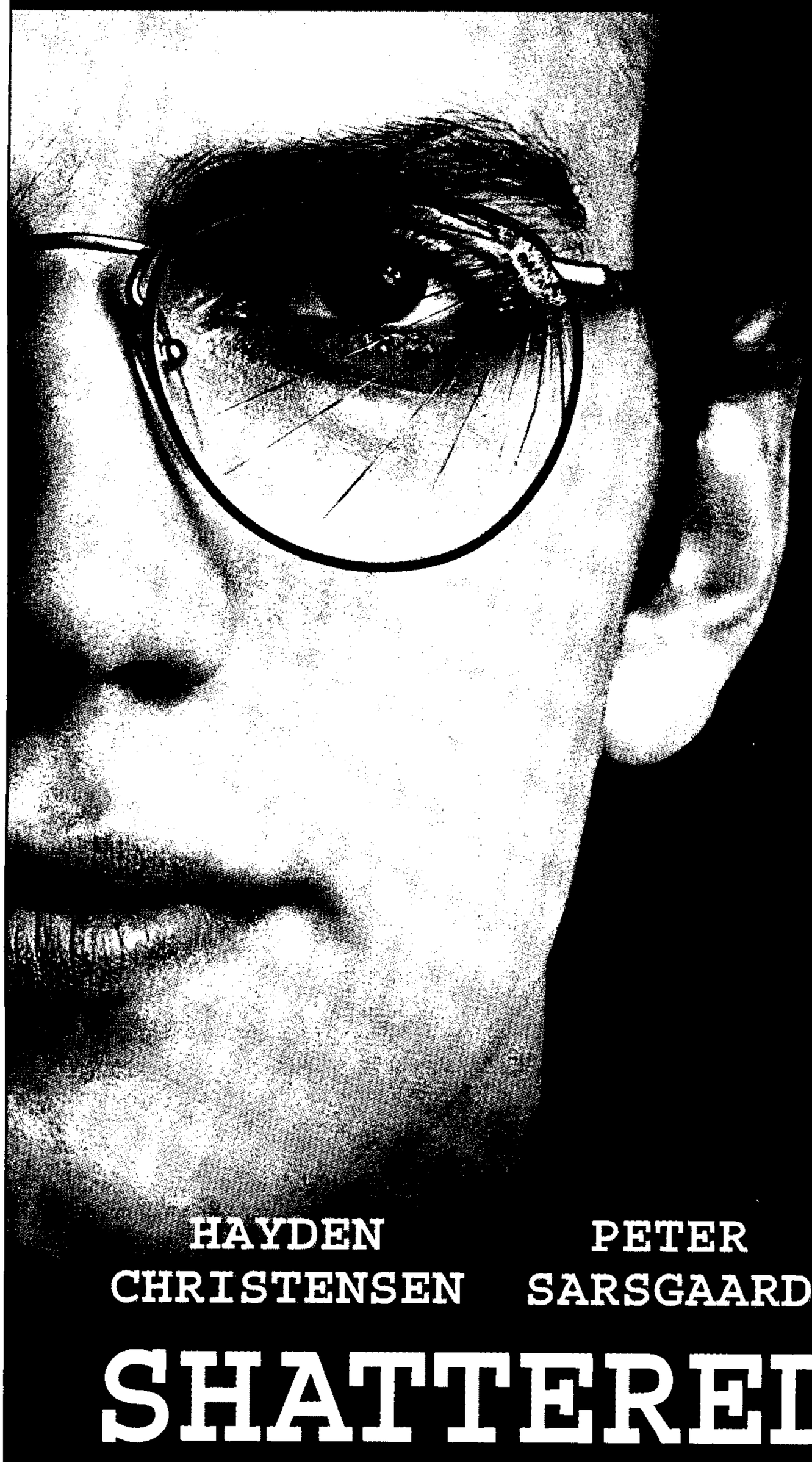

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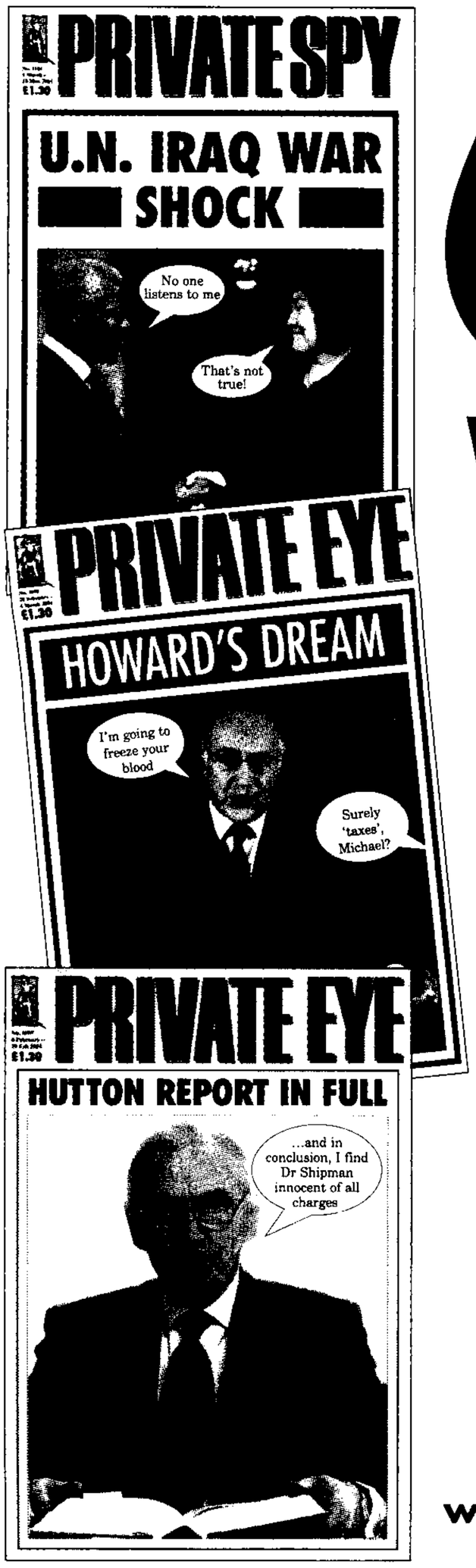
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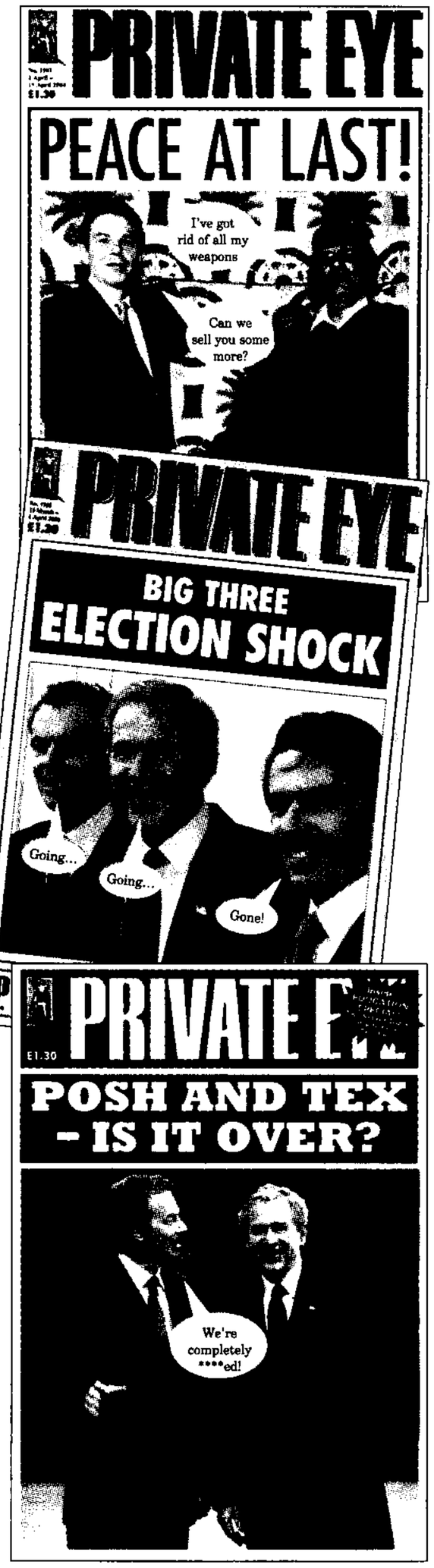

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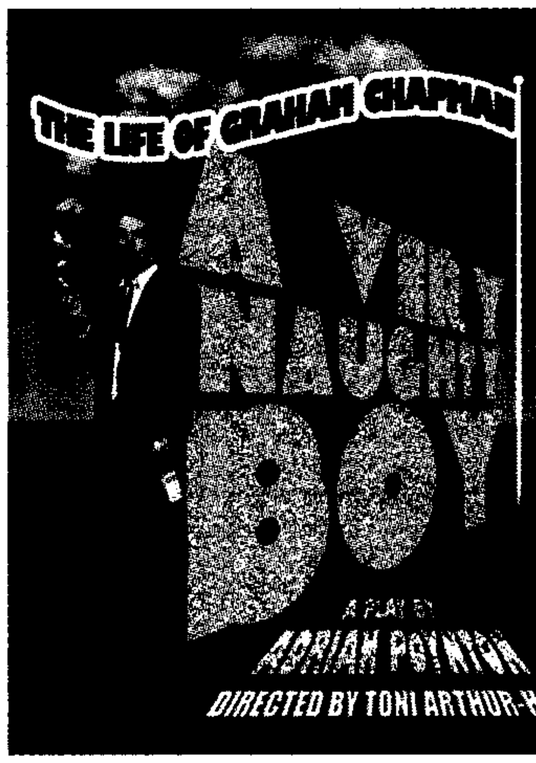

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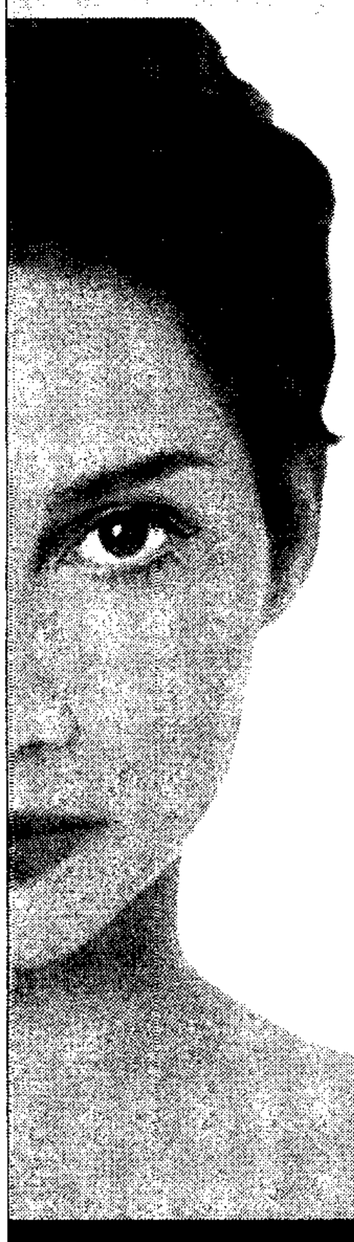

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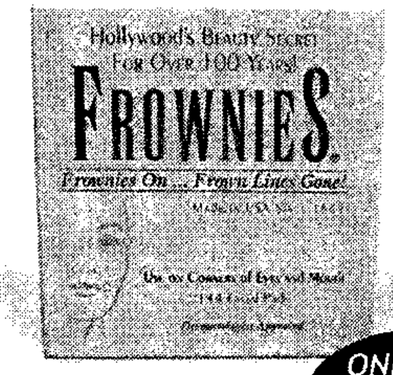

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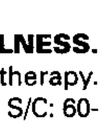

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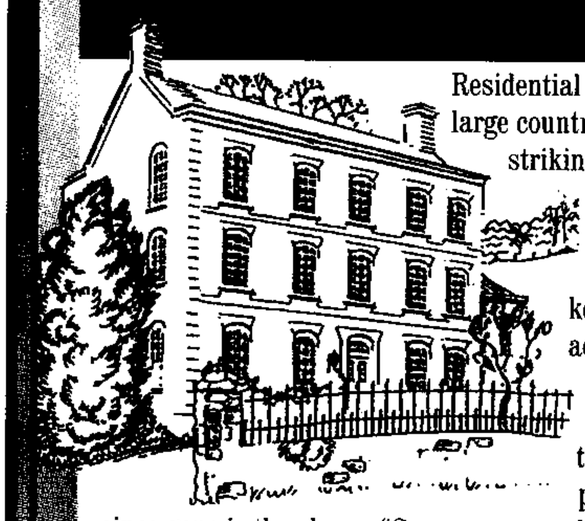

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